ENGLISH LITERATURE IN ACCOUNT WITH RELIGION

BY

EDWARD MORTIMER CHAPMAN

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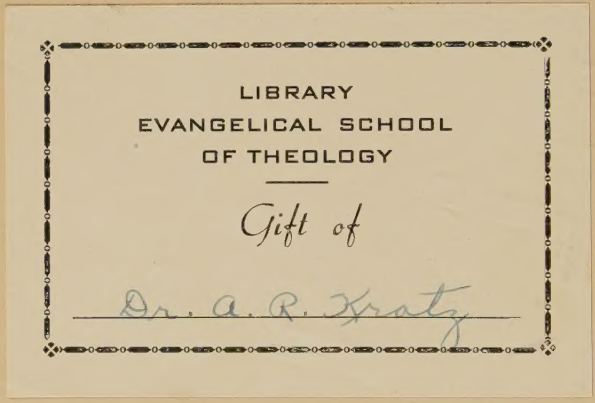

A. Roger Kratz
G. B. I.

By the Same Author

ENGLISH LITERATURE IN ACCOUNT WITH RELIGION.

THE DYNAMIC OF CHRISTIANITY.
A Study of the Vital and Permanent Element in the Christian Religion.

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
BOSTON AND NEW YORK

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1800–1900

BY

EDWARD MORTIMER CHAPMAN

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To
R. C.
AND
M. G. C.

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DEC 2 2 1960

PREFACE

MANY writers of late years have undertaken to expound the 'religion' of this poet or to define the 'faith' of that novelist. I have no charter to essay so high an adventure; but have tried rather to set forth something of the debt which Literature owes to Religion for its subjects, its language, its antagonisms and inspirations, as well as in many cases for the training of its writers; while on the other hand I have wished to suggest the debt which Religion as indisputably owes to Literature for the extension of its influence and the humanizing of its ideals. My treatment of Religion has therefore been very broad and quite as really objective as subjective — to use a pair of threadbare adjectives which have been denied entrance to the following chapters.

Two lectures delivered at Yale in 1906, and entitled "The Influence of Religion upon English Literature during the Nineteenth Century," contained the germ of this book and were indeed a sort of prefatory syllabus; but no page of them is reproduced in it. Portions of the Introduction and of Chapter XIV have appeared in Reviews, but these also have been recast.

The form of certain words upon the following

pages will be found to accord itself to the secondary rather than to the primary spelling of our American dictionaries. Should any friend committed to 'Spelling Reform' discover this and be 'vext,' I shall be, so far forth, sorry. The choice of these forms has not been made in mere gratification of a whim or with any desire to seem singular; but with a very strong conviction that unless the freedom to use an elder spelling be sometimes asserted it is likely soon to be denied. I say an elder spelling, not a better, because in determining the orthography of many of these words, individual taste seems to me to have, within due limits, a perfect right to consideration. Freedom of thought and a more or less gracious refusal to be bound by the dogmas of mere authority have ever been chief characteristics of vital religion and of enduring literature. Neither has felt, however, at least for very long, that in order to serve to-morrow it was necessary to contemn yesterday.

So much time and pains have gone to the verification of quotation, reference, and allusion that I venture to hope — rather against hope, to be sure — that they may be found free from errors grave enough to mislead the reader or to embarrass the writer.

Since some of the later chapters were written Death has been urgent with many eminent and well-beloved names in them; and Meredith, Swinburne, Francis Thompson, and John Davidson in England,

with Sarah Orne Jewett, R. W. Gilder, and T. T. Munger in America, must be added to his roll. Though dead they yet speak with living voice, however, and I have not, in general, felt obliged to change my mode of reference to them.

E. M. C.

Old Lyme, Connecticut,
25 *January*, 1910.

CONTENTS

I. Religion and Literature. Introduction . . 1

II. The Dawn of the New Day 30

Cowper — Crabbe — Burns — Blake.

III. Sons of the Morning 61

Wordsworth and Coleridge.

IV. The Apostles of Revolt 91

Byron and Shelley.

V. The "Edinburgh" and the "Quarterly" . 127

The Reviewers of the "Edinburgh," "Quarterly," "Blackwood's," and "Cockney" groups.

VI. Clapham and Oxford 161

Evangelical and Tractarian — The Clapham Sect — Thornton — Wilberforce — Milner — Venn — Lord Teignmouth — Henry Martyn — Zachary Macaulay — James Stephen and his Family — The Trevelyans — Keble — Newman — Tractarian Literature.

VII. Elijah and Elisha 199

Carlyle and Ruskin.

VIII. The Masters of Fiction. I 236

Dependence of Humour upon Faith — Maria Edgeworth — Jane Austen — Scott — Cooper — Marryat — Poe — The Brontës — Hawthorne.

IX. The Masters of Fiction. II 272

Dickens — Thackeray — Bulwer-Lytton — Mrs. Gaskell — The Kingsleys — Charles Reade — Trollope — George Eliot.

X. The New Radicalism 311

Priestley — Godwin — Bentham — James Mill — John Stuart Mill — Cobbett — Elliott — Cooper — Mazzini — The Broad Churchmen — Maurice — Horace Bushnell — Martineau — Emerson — The New England Poets.

XI. The Great Twin Brethren 349

Tennyson and Browning.

XII. Darwin and his Ploughshare 394

Romanes and his Experience — Charles Darwin — Huxley and the Agnostics — Agassiz — Gray — Le Conte — Fiske — Drummond.

XIII. The Doubters and the Mystics 423

Songs of Doubt and Disillusion generally sung by Young Men — Clough — Matthew Arnold — The Relation between Doubter and Mystic — The True Mystic — Christina Rossetti — D. G. Rossetti — William Morris — Edward FitzGerald.

XIV. The Heyday of Minor Poetry 460

A Dubious Title introduced by Two Great Names — George Meredith — Swinburne — James Thomson and "The City of Dreadful Night" — John Davidson — "Bard of the Dimbo-Vitza" — Henley — W. V. Moody — Rolleston — Austin Dobson — Mrs. Meynall — C. G. D. Roberts — Francis Thompson — Walt Whitman — William Watson — Stephen Phillips — T. E. Brown — Stevenson — Kipling.

XV. The Newer Fiction. I 495

The Reaction of Philosophy upon the Historian — Upon the Novelist — Possible Unreality of Realism — The 'Religious' Novel — Sunday School Books — The Novel of Religion and Manners — The Novel of Manners — The 'Early Christian' Novel — The Theological Novel — George Macdonald — "Robert Elsmere" — "Ships that Pass in the Night" — "The Story of an African Farm" — "Mark Rutherford" — The 'Social Problem' Novel — George Gissing.

XVI. The Newer Fiction. II 533

The Novel of Life as touched by Faith or Doubt — Meredith — Stevenson — Kipling — Thomas Hardy — Eden Phillpotts — Conclusion.

Index 563

ENGLISH LITERATURE IN ACCOUNT WITH RELIGION

ENGLISH LITERATURE IN ACCOUNT WITH RELIGION

CHAPTER I

RELIGION AND LITERATURE

Mazzini, upon being asked what he would have taught in school, is said to have replied: "Some knowledge of Astronomy. A man learns nothing if he has n't learned to wonder, and Astronomy better than any science teaches him something of the mystery and grandeur of the universe." [1]

He spoke with the insight and the exaggeration of genius. As a suggestion his dictum is profoundly true; and its truth is as significant for criticism as for education. Great literature takes account of the Universe with its mystery and grandeur; not of course in any pedantic or grandiloquent fashion, but with an implicit realization of it. The genuine poet or creative novelist always writes with a keen sense of the interrelation of events. To say this is in no sense to imply that literature is usually the product of a bland and contented acceptance of the scheme of things; great literature almost never

[1] *Letters of J. R. Green*, Leslie Stephen, editor, p. 326.

springs of such lineage, but it none the less relates itself vitally to the scheme of things; it may be by way of acceptance and illustration; it may be by way of refusal and revolt; it may be even more often by way of quest and search and wonder. A small man is prone to be effusive in emphasizing his acceptance and professing his allegiance. The sense of the universal finds quick and cheap utterance at his lips. The great man is less easily moved to confession of the faith which animates him because of its very greatness and his sense of the world's inevitableness and mystery. "I accept the Universe," cried Margaret Fuller in a moment of ecstasy. They told Carlyle. "Gad!" growled he, with characteristic grimness; "Gad! she'd better."

In all this the path of literature lies parallel to that of religion. They are old and dear companions — brethren indeed of one blood; not always agreeing, to be sure; squabbling rather in true brotherly fashion now and then; occasionally falling out very seriously and bitterly; but still interdependent and necessary to each other. It is my purpose in the following chapters to illustrate this interrelation from the literary history of the last century. This seems worth doing for several reasons: in the first place the period covered by our proposed study was in a very notable degree a period of unrest and transition in religious thought. The third and perhaps most characteristic quarter of the century might properly be designated, indeed, as a time of

theological revolution. The foundations of faith were shaken. Sober-minded men to whom the past was sacred, the long-established institutions of the present dear, and who felt an unselfish responsibility for the future, looked out upon a scene which gave them grave concern. Even some champions of the new order of things in the realm of thought, grew serious as they contemplated the possible extent of their own influence. They were by no means men of destructive habit or ambition; but it seemed for a time during those five and twenty years as though the negative result of their work might prove to be so mordant and far-reaching as to preclude the chance of reconstruction in the realms of ethics and religion. The last quarter of a century was characterized by a temper somewhat less truculent on the one side and less anxious on the other. Neither the priests of 'natural' science nor those of 'revealed' religion were quite so much inclined to dogmatism in their mutual affirmations and denials. Thus, by the year of grace 1900, it had become pretty evident that religion's lease of life was to be a longer one than the secularist of 1875 had been disposed to admit.

This general agreement that religion is likely to prove a permanent concern of mankind constitutes a second reason for undertaking such a study as I propose. Instead of attempting to explain religion away, the scientific spirit of to-day would seem to require that we observe it, that we make record of

its experience, that we account for it at least to the extent of tracing its secondary causes, and that we make some attempt to determine its probable course in the future.

It is to be noted, furthermore, that a study of the religious import of English literature during this extraordinary transition century is likely to prove of especial significance. In the first place the range and wealth of this literature have been enormous — greater probably than those of any other period in any language; though the Elizabethan age may have surpassed it in the intrinsic worth of its relatively restricted product, and Goethe's marvellously long day sufficed for a work by himself and his contemporaries of two generations comparable to it. In the second place, this English literature has been a literature of the people in a new and significant measure. It has appealed to a public numerically greater than any other literature has known; and that public has been avid and acquisitive of knowledge in a unique degree. A very large and appreciative section of this public, distinctly the most alert and plastic portion of it, has spent the century in one of the noblest of human adventures — the building of a nation. It has conquered a wilderness; founded and brought to maturity commonwealths of vast extent, population, and wealth; fought the greatest of civil wars for the sake of an idea, and survived the conflict because of that idea's vital force; devoted itself with un-

precedented effectiveness to the development of the natural resources of a peculiarly endowed country; and, with it all, striven, as no people ever strove before, so to organize its experience and knowledge as to make them available for its children by a system of free public education. It was inevitable that this effort should often be as crude as it was honest and eager, but none the less it has succeeded in making a multitude of keen and facile minds amenable to the influences of literature. One would go too far in claiming that the public-school system of America has acquainted its pupils with literature; and of course it has not bred a literature. Its failure in these respects for several generations was probably unavoidable. The Day's Work has generally been too ready, near, and appealing to the young American to permit his mind to turn in upon itself. He quickly forms the busy habit, and literature is jealous of preoccupation by so-called practical matters.

A thoughtful observer is the more reconciled to this condition of affairs, however, as he remembers the shallow and silly cry which has arisen from time to time in America for a distinctively national literature. Attempts have been made — once or twice, I believe, by teachers in universities — to indicate the characteristics which should differentiate the American from the English literary product, as though the spirit of Truth could become the creature of custom-house, tariff, and provincial prejudice. America can afford to wait and learn until

the brief day of such treason to her own past is over — a past which gives her part and lot in every century of English literature save one, and waits to give her an abundant share in that if she will claim it. Nineteenth-century literature was unique in its privilege of immediate appeal to a world-wide public, without necessity of suffering any sea-change or paying tribute of translation at any boundary. Britain has naturally been the great contributor to its volume, but she has neither claimed nor wished to claim any exclusive sovereignty over sound English speech. The worth of Emerson, Poe, and Whitman has been as generously appraised in England as in America; while Carlyle, Ruskin, and Browning have found as quick response here as at home. It is therefore scarcely necessary to say that in the chapters which follow I shall consider English literature as connoting the product of a great language and a great religious, social, and political experience, common in its essence to the whole Anglo-American race. "Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark," saith the Deuteronomist. Thrice cursed let him be who would reënact Babel, and introduce schism into his mother-tongue.

An exercise in definition is no part of my present purpose, but it is necessary here to indicate the scope and range which will be permitted to some words of frequent occurrence in our inquiry. The etymology of 'religion' still eludes us. Cicero preferred the derivation from *relegere*, to read over

again, as children might con a lesson.[1] Modern scholars like better to connect the word with *religāre*, to bind, in the effort to find a definition and a sanction. Religion is that bond which connects our lives with God, and lays the sense of obligation upon us. All great words of this sort are certain to increase and enrich their content as human experience pays tribute to them; and 'religion' is a notable example of such growth. Upon the one side it looks toward conduct; upon another toward observance or worship. Within, its office is to search the heart, that it may remain contrite and humble, and at the same time to uplift and cheer it by assurance of life's kinship with the divine. Thus, as the thought and life of last century developed, 'religion' in an increasing degree came to signify that faith or experience which should suffice to make life coherent and harmonious. Religion not only links man to God; it binds the incidents of his experience into a vital whole — a true "bundle of life," to use the quaint Scripture phrase. While taking account of all the phenomena of the inward realm of thought and the outward realm of conduct, it insists upon the possibility and the worth of a true consistency.

Religion is the enemy of all discord except such temporary unrest as the ploughshare causes in its preparation of the encrusted and fallow field for fruitfulness. It convicts of sin without troubling

[1] Cf. *New English Dictionary* (Murray's).

itself overmuch about definitions of sin. With a singular persistence it holds a mirror up to man's nature, in which he cannot help but see the things that mar his individual and social peace. While engaged in such duty, Religion's ears know very well the old cry of man's demoniac seizures: "What have we to do with thee"; yet she is not disheartened. Quite as well she knows the obduracies and obstinacies behind which men hide themselves; the superstitions which creep in at the window when she is banished from the door; all the infelicity, pettiness, and hypocrisy which mar life's wholeness. She has reason for discouragement in view of the sad imperfection of her best human instruments; yet with divine humility she still works cheerfully with obdurate materials. Her worst enemies are too often those of her own household; yet she outlives their misrepresentations. She speaks many languages; visualizes herself in many forms; by a mysterious alchemy transmutes base metal into gold; feeds upon persecution; makes allies of those who threaten the sources of her very existence, and so endures with something of the power of an endless life. Like the Psalmist she is a wonder unto many; a reproach to some, an object of wistful but hopeless desire to others, a joy to such as heed her message; at least these so report, and with such persistence and conviction as to make it worth while to inquire a little more closely into the basis of their confidence.

When we ask for a succinct statement of this message of wholeness and peace, our ears may well be deafened by the multitude, volume, and seeming conflict of the replies. The chorus of believers is ill trained in concerted effort. Yet some things sound reasonably clear and intelligible.

Religion believes in and proclaims the Universe. All her life is based upon faith in cosmos rather than chaos. There is a scheme and plan in Man and Nature, so that the two belong to each other; and though this plan transcends a man's ability to grasp and subdue it to his purposes, because it is so great, it is still cognate to his mind; it is amenable to expression in terms of thought, so far as experience can compass it. Phenomena do not put us to permanent confusion. They mystify us often enough, but it is with a challenge to our curiosity and spirit of adventure rather than with a tyrannous and insane denial. All our experience leads us to live upon the hypothesis that there is a reason and a cause for every event — a cause which may conceivably be made manifest, and, if manifested, will prove to be in harmony with the scheme of causation underlying other phenomena.

This is Religion's way of saying that the Universe has a Soul; and that at the source of things there dwells a Vital Force, of such nature that all its outflowings and ongoings belong together, even when men are unable to perceive their relation. Yet the fact that man can perceive so much coher-

ence, and that, as he pursues his research into the world without and his own heart within, the field of intelligibility constantly grows, is a matter of prime significance to him. It means nothing less than that this Cosmic Power is mirrored in his own soul. He discovers that the little world of his personal experience is cognate to the great world of universal experience, and that while he is in one sense the product of Nature, he is in another the reader of her secrets, and fitted to be the master of her forces. Quite naturally he reaches the conclusion that the attributes of Mind and Will belong to this Vital Force, which operates in a fashion so orderly and so coherent as to be intelligible when he can isolate a portion of its workings, and which is mysterious as to the rest only because the multitude of phenomena is so vast and intricate.

A necessary consequence follows. Man cannot treat such a conclusion as this, to which the experience of the race, the appeal of his own heart, and the trend of his thinking lead him, as a mere curious phenomenon, to be acknowledged — and neglected. He is impelled by a sort of instinctive honour to admit that a force which vitalizes the Universe after such a fashion as to imply the presence and activity of mind and will must be a Person as he understands the term. Man names him — God. It is a word which, like every personal name, transcends definition; all names of persons being, indeed, but counters or symbols which stand for experience,

meaning much or little according as personal relations have been intimate or remote. The meaning of no name can be adequately communicated by hearsay.

Religion takes up this experience of man, seeking, finding, and following God, as the Spirit of power and truth, who vitalizes the Universe, and describes the relation in one pregnant phrase: "And God created man in his own image; in the image of God created He him." Out of the same Hebrew tradition she chooses another phrase to characterize man's history and the promise of his future: "And God said, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it." The fact that such a word is of uncertain date and dubious authorship in no sense invalidates its worth; because since the beginning, man's adventure in the earth has been precisely that which Genesis outlines — the struggle for his own life, for the life of his offspring, for a subjugation of the earth's material resource, and for an ultimate mastery of circumstance. Man remains the one indomitable creature. This man or that may seem to go down before hostile chance; but Man refuses to be permanently subjugated. The elemental forces of Nature terrify him temporarily, and occasionally overwhelm a multitude of individuals. But Man is of such a sort that ultimately they must serve him. The constellations wheeling in their orbits represent an insoluble mystery, in one aspect of it; but none the less they are

harnessed to man's watch-wheels and clock-weights. It has become a part of their diurnal task to tell him the time or to reveal his position in mid-ocean; the very ocean itself, meanwhile, trackless as its waste is, and ungovernable as its fury seems, having been subdued into his chief beast of burden.

So Religion is always calling men to a consideration of the greatness of their life upon the earth. She speaks of sin as a marring of man's chance — an interruption of the natural relation which should exist between him and God. She treats him always as though he were endowed with a will to choose, if not his path, at least the direction in which he would fain strike out a path if he could. The immemorial metaphysical debate about free will is not of quite so much moment to Religion as it seems to be, since she bases her call to men upon the phenomena of daily experience rather than upon the premisses and conclusions of a merely formal logic. Though free will be a delusion and sin a shadow, still the shadow is of a fatal sort and must be reckoned with in a world where shadows sometimes have more meaning than the substances which cast them.

Of Salvation, too, Religion has much to say, meaning by it a possession of the place and power of mastery which belong to man of right — a place and power into which, to be sure, he was never thrust by any creative violence, but which have always been his in some degree, and which in their perfection represent the goal of his development.

It is in the exercise of the great divine-human functions of faith, hope, and love that salvation is attained. Religion indeed cares little enough whether man thinks of this condition as attained or conferred, — her greatest literature uses both forms of speech, — since it consists in the entrance of the Divine Spirit, the Vital Creative and Sustaining Power, into a man's life as its regnant influence; and it results in a peace which comes of a conscious mastery of circumstance by the man himself. He is no longer debased by poverty; he is no longer afraid of to-morrow; he is no longer killed by death. Great thoughts become his companions and great deeds his ambition — the greatest of all, perhaps, being the realization of the worth of small things, and the doing of them patiently.

It will be readily admitted that here we have the material of literature; for literature like religion depends upon vision and sympathy. Both deal with matters of the common day; but neither stops in the common, or counts it to be unclean. The burning wayside shrub suddenly becoming vocal and transforming its neighbourhood into sacred ground because the spirit of truth inflames it, is the symbol of religious and literary inspiration — yes, and of scientific inspiration, too, as we shall delight to acknowledge when we have become more truly clairvoyant. Both literature and religion deal with the elemental things in man and nature; both are gifts to the imagination and make corresponding

demands upon it. The poet takes of the things of life and shows them to us, whether they be the Saturday evening happenings in the cottage of a Scots peasant, or the struggle of a soul climbing the Mount of Paradise. The prophet looks upon a basket of summer fruit, and in its over-ripeness sees the doom which threatens Israel; or he has a vision of the lot of such as wait upon the Lord, uplifted on eagle's wings, running without weariness, and walking the dustiest ways without fainting — ever masters of fate. All these things, little and great alike, are taken up by religion and literature and shown to us under their universal aspect: the Past is made Present, and the Present is related indissolubly to the Past; indeed hunger, want, love, hate, joy, sorrow, sin, penitence, and forgiveness cease to be either old or new and become perennial when touched by the hand of the Spirit's interpreter. Thus the wonder of the stars above and of the instincts of the heart within is renewed in each generation. Hence, despite the fact that there is nothing new under the sun, neither literature nor religion ever palls, becomes obsolete, or bygone. Their forms of expression change but the substance remains fresh and vital. The longer our experience of the Universe in which God dwells and through the avenues of which His Spirit enters into touch with man, the more our wonder grows at man's littleness and greatness, his limitations and his chance.

"What is man, that thou art mindful of him, and

the son of man, that thou visitest him?" asked the Hebrew poet, face to face with this contrast; conscious of the brevity of his life's span, but equally assured that it sufficed to set him face to face with God. Stevenson voiced the same wonder and implied the same faith in exclaiming: —

"What a monstrous spectre is this man, the disease of the agglutinated dust, lifting alternate feet or lying drugged with slumber; killing, feeding, growing, bringing forth small copies of himself; grown upon with hair like grass, fitted with eyes that move and glitter in his face; a thing to set children screaming! — and yet, looked at nearlier, known as his fellows know him, how surprising are his attributes! Poor soul, here for so little, cast among so many hardships, filled with desires so incommensurate and so inconsistent, savagely surrounded, savagely descended, irremediably condemned to prey upon his fellow lives: who should have blamed him had he been of a piece with his destiny and a being merely barbarous? And we look and behold him instead filled with imperfect virtues; infinitely childish, often admirably valiant, often touchingly kind; sitting down, amidst his momentary life, to debate of right and wrong and the attributes of the Deity; rising up to do battle for an egg or die for an idea; singling out his friends or his mate with cordial affection; bringing forth in pain, rearing with long-suffering solicitude his young. To touch the heart of his mystery, we find in him one thought, strange to the point of lunacy: the thought of duty; the thought of some-

thing owing to himself, to his neighbour, to his God; an ideal of decency, to which he would rise if it were possible; a limit of shame, below which, if it be possible, he will not stoop."[1]

The development of so much that is great in language from the written oracles of religion has therefore been a natural one, and it is fitting that German should be under such obligation to the Gothic Scriptures of Ulfilas and to the Bible of Martin Luther; even as English is debtor to Wickliffe, the Book of Common Prayer, and the King James Version. It is fitting, too, that we should emphasize as the present generation is doing the extraordinary literary quality of the matter as well as the manner of Hebrew and Christian Scripture. These deal, as has been already implied, with common human experiences, but they conceive these experiences under universal forms. The traditions of the Old Testament are in this sense ageless. It is only when pulled about and tortured by some unimaginative critic on the one hand, or by some nervous and faithless apologist on the other, that they lose their charm. Their utter naturalness and simplicity, their candour, their artistic restraint, their frequent pathos and occasional humour, all fit them to be the vehicles of a

[1] *Across the Plains; Pulvis et Umbra.* Cf. Pascal: *Thoughts*, chap. x. "What a chimera, then, is man! What a novelty, what a chaos, what a subject of contradiction, what a prodigy!"

divine message. In view of this fact there is something almost pitiable in the anxiety with which the question of the inspiration of the Old Testament is discussed. If a man have not spiritual and literary sense enough to perceive this inspiration, I do not see how it is to be proved to him, any more than the glories of a sunset can be proved to a blind man; or if, on the other hand, the critic or the literalist have such a notion of inspiration as to fancy that imagination can play no part in an inspired writing, that sacred history must of necessity be a collection of miraculously inerrant annals, and that in a book calculated to perform a peculiar religious office no place can be found for the traditions, legends, and poetry of a peculiarly endowed people, again it is hard to discover any language which shall be mechanical and plodding enough for the purposes of argument with him.

In point of fact, however, argument is superfluous here, either for offence or defence. The Spirit speaks through Genesis, and would still speak to such as have ears to hear, though it were robbed of every claim to historicity. Discerning men feel instinctively the appeal of Abraham turned out of doors by his faith, the conflict of good and evil in shifty Jacob, the moral integrity of exiled Joseph, the long patience and high statesmanship of Moses building a nation out of a horde of slaves, the constancy of Ruth, the tragedy of

Saul trading faith for superstition, the warfare of flesh and spirit in David, who, like Milton's lion, lived partly in the air of God's new day even while his body was still chained to the old world of mire and dust, — all these, to say nothing of the great line of prophets, are of every time and for all men. They translate the experience of religion into a *lingua franca* which each man understands and wherein he sees his own hopes and struggles prefigured.

It is not difficult, therefore, to establish the legitimate relation between religion and that literature which deals with the adventures of the soul in its aspiration toward God, or its rebellion against Him. What shall we say concerning the very voluminous literature, some of it among the choicest possessions of our speech and some of it base and sorry enough, which deals primarily with the relation of the sexes and the passion of love? It has been customary to treat this as belonging to the 'secular' rather than to the 'religious' side of experience. Yet religion is the great unifier — the great healer of schism; moreover, its natural relation to human love has been made plainer and clearer than ever before by the advance of modern science and the general acceptance of the theory of development. We can afford to admit, at least for the purposes of argument, that the highest and purest affection between man and woman is of the lineage — distant perhaps, but none the less real

and legitimate — of mere physical affinity. Christianity recognizes all human instincts as significant both for the individual and for the race. Its appeal to men is not the appeal of asceticism, which exalts the partial, but the appeal of an expanding and growing life, whose goal is completeness. When it uses the language of asceticism, advocating even the plucking out of an eye or the cutting away of an offending hand, it is with the express statement that formal schism in the physical body is better than real schism between the soul and God. Holiness implies wholeness; salvation means mastery of circumstance; and this mastery must begin within before it can be enforced without. Religion therefore recognizes all interplay of human passion as one of its chief concerns. All efforts toward the orderly development, the chastening and sublimation of the great elemental instincts of mankind, are germane to it. Hence love and hunger are two of the principal themes of religion and literature. Their ramifications are as infinitely varied as life itself. Love begins, let us say, as the sexual instinct which leads a primitive man and woman to pair as the animals pair, or as a semi-gregarious instinct which leads men to associate themselves temporarily for defence or adventure. By degrees Creative Power worked out His vast purposes through the use of such primitive material as this. The family emerged in some rudimentary fashion. Children must needs be cared for and nourished

through a term of infancy whose length seemed to be out of all proportion to man's place and importance as a mere animal. This meant common self-denial, restriction of freedom, increase of mutual interest, growth of sympathy between father and mother, parent and child. Thought, toil, peril for the sake of one another, wrought their natural effects. These things would seem at first sight to have set limits to experience and to have narrowed life. In point of fact they gave it a new dimension, adding depth and height to its former length. Men began to live by deeds, not years. The greatest and most enduring of Christian virtues began to be. Of course the path of this development must have been strewn with the wrecks of tragedy and enlivened with the play of comedy. It is a long way from the mere instinct of sexual affinity to the love stronger than death which leads a man and a woman to

> walk this world
> Yoked in all exercise of noble ends,

but the path is continuous. It is an arduous climb from the temporary and jealous association into which the passing needs of a primitive day once brought two men, to the mutual devotion which leads a man to lay down his life for his friend; but the ascent has been made. The office of religion is to inspire and to empower these travellers; it is the part of literature to tell the story of the journey. In it must needs appear every phase of expe-

rience, since the race has even yet accomplished its redemption so imperfectly that love is dogged by lust, fealty by treachery, and joy by tears. The way is long; some wander and are lost; some fall to rise again, and some to rise no more; some turn back in frank rebellion; some help and some hinder; some are always hopeful of the adventure's outcome; and some are fearful lest, after all the struggle, it shall appear that their path leads nowhither. For all these religion has its high message; of them all literature takes careful and sympathetic note.

The literature, therefore, which has in it the deepest and most significant religious element will be by no means always the most 'pious' in form. As Dr. T. T. Munger has recently put it with characteristic grace and cogency: —

"The Christian value of an author is not to be determined by the fulness of his Christian assertion. There is, of course, immense value in the positive, full-statured believers like Dante and Bacon and Milton and Browning. . . . But Christianity is all the while in need of two things: correction of its mistakes and perversions, and development in the direction of its universality. . . . An earnest skeptic is often the best man to find the obscured path of faith. . . . Goethe taught Christianity to think scientifically, and prepared the way for it to include modern science."[1]

[1] T. T. Munger, *Essays for the Day*, pp. 82–83.

In view of these facts it remains to indicate in a cursory and general way some of the interrelations between religion and literature which seem significant enough to be the objects of our quest.

In the first place, literature often avowedly makes religion its chief material. This is true in the case not only of sermons and works of formal divinity, which belong to special rather than general literature, but of the great literary monuments. The idea of tragedy which animated Æschylus and Sophocles was primarily religious. Lucretius was a theologian.

> Lucretius — nobler than his mood;
> Who dropped his plummet down the broad
> Deep universe, and said "No God,"
>
> Finding no bottom: he denied
> Divinely the divine, and died
> Chief poet on the Tiber-side
>
> By Grace of God! his face is stern
> As one compelled, in spite of scorn,
> To teach a truth he would not learn.

The adjective *divina*, to which Dante gives a chief place on his title-page, is the most significant and descriptive word to be found there. Spenser sang the soul's adventures in a great allegory. Milton's avowed purpose in "Paradise Lost" was to justify the ways of God to man; and so masterful was his genius that, for weal or woe, he may almost be said to be the creator of the heaven and hell of English-speaking folk. Pope filled our commonplace

books with quotations when he essayed to study man in his moral and spiritual aspect — a theme as religious as Pope's day and style would permit. Johnson's gigantic capacity for prejudice was frankly enlisted upon the side of the religion of the Church of England ; yet the veriest cynic who follows his noble and pathetic, even if somewhat grotesque, figure through the pages of the "Life," which is, after all, Johnson's chief contribution to English literature, must admit it to be in the larger sense a profoundly religious book — a book for the soul's instruction and reproof as well as a fountain of humour and all intellectual delights.

I need not carry my illustrations on into the special field which we are about to traverse. Enough have been cited to indicate the large place which leaders and inspirers of human thought have seen fit to give to religion. The religious problem has seemed to be the one to which great and clear minds have turned instinctively in an attempt to voice a message to their own generation, and, perhaps, if fate were kind, to reach generations then unborn.

An even more interesting bond connecting religion and literature discovers itself as we consider the literature of implicit or avowed unbelief. I shall have occasion to remark upon the fact at some length in dealing with one of the most fascinating and significant sections of last century's literary product. Suffice it to say here that, while the scoffer and the cynic have usually but small chance

of even a literary life beyond the grave, the occasional exceptions very often owe their *quasi*-immortality to the fact that they dealt with religious questions. About the only title to remembrance that Lucian can be said to have, beyond the doubtful value of his unique Greek to college class-rooms, is the fact that he saw fit to exercise his nimble wit upon the gods. Tom Paine's services to the cause of American independence were real, even though not very great; yet they seem likely to be forgotten in spite of all that disinterested historians and vehement apologists can do to perpetuate their memory. Paine will be remembered, however, because he has associated his name with religion — probably not with hostile intent, for there is a positive as well as negative side to his "Common Sense"; the negative side, however, was the one upon which posterity has fastened its regard, and according to its instinctive habit, which is either to forget such a man altogether or else to remember him as *persona non grata*, Paine has attained to a sorry sort of fame. He must be reckoned with, for better for worse, by the historian of his century, mainly on the ground of his theological works.

So upon a far higher plane, while Tyndall and Huxley won their deserved repute among scientific men by their originality and industry as investigators in the field of pure science, they were even more indebted for the prominence and influence which were finally theirs to the fact that both be-

came theologians of eminence; so quick is the world to recognize the word of any man who speaks upon the subject of religion as one having authority, to be a matter of immediate moment.

What I am obliged, for lack of a better phrase, to call, rather awkwardly, the precedent influence of religion upon literature is worth at least a passing glance. Monasteries and convents were for generations the home and refuge of letters. The Church has always been the nursing mother of literature — often enough unwise, petulant, overanxious and sometimes even cruel in her fear, but yet fostering and passing on from generation to generation, if not sound learning itself, yet the tools and means for its development. The interesting studies of Mr. Galton in the antecedents and circumstances of men of talent or genius showed a notably large percentage of them to have come from the families of ministers of religion. This is natural enough, since, whatever their circumstances, the clergy are, as a class, peculiarly ambitious to provide the best educational advantages for their children. The remotest missionaries covet university training for their sons, and obtain it in an astonishing number of cases. Furthermore, the training of clerical homes is generally of a sort fitted to impress the minds of children with the worth of large and generous ideas, the impression being often all the more vivid because the amplitude of parental interests has very likely been attained in spite of circum-

stances so narrow as to make daily threats of sordidness. The books which make up the family library, though often all too few, are sure to contain some genuine literature; the newspapers and magazines which find their way to the reading-table are chosen with discrimination; and the whole atmosphere of the home is relatively congenial to observation and thought. Let it be added, too, that it is likely to be illuminated with a play of humour which stimulates the imagination, and lightens while it encourages intellectual activity; since, as I shall have occasion to show somewhat later on, humour is of the household of faith, — a sister sitting by right, and not by mere sufferance, at Religion's table.

This brief reference will suffice to suggest the relation which naturally exists between the office of the minister of religion and the production of literature. He is called, and his business is to call others, to love God with the mind as well as with the heart. All human experience should therefore interest him. As a confessor and adviser the secrets of many hearts are opened to him, and thus the choicest material of literature is placed at his hand. Honour forbids him to use it, to be sure, as it forbids one who has but a life interest in an estate to impair its integrity; but there is none the less an inevitable and legitimate increment of profit inuring to him. The business of his soul within and of his profession without makes him sympathetic with literature and a more or less keen student of the

literary product of his day. It is not strange, therefore, that the majority of our higher institutions of learning should have been founded by men committed to the interests of religion; or that clergymen and their children, unto the third and fourth generation, should so often be numbered among the writers of books.

So every great religious movement leaves its mark in letters. 'Literary men' are proverbially prone to sneer at religious revival; yet the sneer ill becomes those who love good literature. The literary prowess of Germany is inextricably linked to the spirit of the Reformation. The achievements of Queen Elizabeth's day in letters cannot be divorced from the searchings of heart and the awakenings of imagination and ambition which marked the reign of her father. The Evangelical Revival and its inevitable counterpart, the Oxford Movement, left ineffaceable imprints upon the English literature of last century. The famous Clapham sect might serve as a concrete example. Here were a group of highly intelligent families, committed heart and soul to the principles of the Evangelical faith, and living in sufficiently close touch for frequent social intercourse and constant interchange of ideas. Who shall measure the literary influence of the Wilberforces, the Macaulays, and two generations of the Trevelyans, together with Stephen and his sons Sir James FitzJames and Sir Leslie, to say nothing of the Venns and Gisbornes? It does not matter

from our present standpoint that the children in several instances departed widely from the faith of the fathers; the thesis might conceivably be maintained that the wider the departure the more clearly marked was the religious impulse; but whether this be the case or not, it suffices for our present purpose to note the undeniable precedent religious element in the literature produced by this group of families. I am content to indicate the phenomenon. My only claim at present is that it is significant enough to challenge investigation.

As our discussion proceeds, some further interrelations between religion and literature will be pointed out. Though not necessarily of minor importance, they are less likely to demand constant attention than the three already indicated. It is no part of my purpose to sketch the whole course of English literature during the fruitful century to be considered, or to treat the work of any of its great contributors exhaustively. In many cases I shall prefer to choose, always I hope with fairness, some one work of an author as significant of the religious element in his writing; nor shall I hesitate to turn aside now and then to consider the productions of some writers whose claim to a place among contributors to permanent literature is in grave doubt, if only they seem to be representatives of their day. I especially desire to give generous treatment to the large and eminently characteristic group of writers whose attitude toward Christianity in par-

ticular, or toward religion in general, has appeared to be one of searching criticism if not of positive hostility. It may be that these will prove to be the most significant witnesses of all to the ineradicable fascination which religion seems to exercise over the mind of man. Wherever the mystery of life and death asserts itself a door stands open to the entrance of religion, and the material of literature is ready.

CHAPTER II

THE DAWN OF THE NEW DAY

Mr. Watts-Dunton, in his essay on "The Renascence of Wonder in Poetry," has characterized the eighteenth century as a period of acceptance; in contrast wherewith he considers the nineteenth century to have been a period of reawakening wonder. There is something more than a half-truth in his suggestion. It is as difficult to define an age as to define a person — and the definition of persons is frankly impossible. All attempts even to characterize them are attended with well-nigh equal danger and fascination. Character is so elusive and yet so momentous a thing that clever talk about it possesses unfailing interest; we are so prone, on the other hand, to jump at conclusions which eventually prove to be our own condemnation, as to make all gossip perilous, and all personal judgement doubtful. Within limits, however, we may admit 'acceptance' to have been a characteristic note of the eighteenth century, especially as voiced in its poetry and politer letters. That last adjective indeed was the bane of its literature. Things that would not submit to polish were anathema to Pope and his school. An atmosphere of literal urbanity surrounded their

writing, nowhere more evidently than when nature or the country was the theme. A partial exception may be made in favour of Thomson, whose "Seasons" were in some real sense the seasons which we know. But, in general, when the sights and sounds of rural life were dealt with, it was with half-veiled apology and patronage, or with a sentimental affectation for which great literary gifts and exquisite workmanship could ill atone. Goldsmith had a tender heart and an acquaintance at first hand with the sorrows and struggles of the poor; yet there is something about "Sweet Auburn" which irresistibly recalls Marie Antoinette's high-heeled shepherdesses playing at country life in the gardens of Versailles. None the less it was mightily to the taste of Goldsmith's day, and most pronouncedly so, one suspects, when it was most sentimental. "I shall never be tired of Goldsmith's 'Deserted Village' — I shall never look again into Crabbe's 'Village,'" said Mrs. Barbauld characteristically enough to Crabb Robinson; who, it must be added, had himself so much of the spirit of acceptance that he declined to read the later works of this great poet of the poor.[1]

I have elsewhere maintained[2] that the nineteenth century has been very largely characterized by the emphasis which it has put upon accomplishment — upon the Deed as contrasted with the Word, the

[1] Diary, Dec. 29, 1835.

[2] *Dynamic of Christianity*, chap. ii.

form instead of the spirit of revelation. It has been an age of enormously significant discovery, but the results have remained to a large extent in the form of facts, instead of resolving themselves into digestible and assimilable truth. Mr. Watts-Dunton calls it an age of wonder; but it seems rather to have been an age when the capacity for wonder had just begun to awake. The wealth of material which natural science and industrial invention have supplied to life has been so great as to reduce the capacity for reverent wonder in those very regions where we should expect it to have been enhanced. The third quarter of the century wondered truly — but less at the mystery of life, death, and human personality than at its own marvellous achievements. Hence has arisen a sort of scientific dogmatism not infrequently approaching Pharisaism. This sophomoric phase of experience shows signs of passing away, with the realization that mystery is still as great an element as ever in human life, and that the extension of our radius of experience has served only to enlarge — and, be it noted, in proportion to the square of our progress — its already mighty horizon.

It was but natural, therefore, that the great literature of the century should be the product of its earlier half. The sense of a humble and more seemly wonder was upon men then. They had passed through a great political and social transition. Many of them felt the approach of further changes not less

significant than those associated with the French Revolution, although they could not say where these would manifest themselves. But some, looking out with the eye of true clairvoyance, discerned enough of the future to thrill their own and later generations with their prophecies. I do not see how any one can read Tennyson's anticipations of the spiritual significance of Evolution, or contemplate Goethe's vision of the character which the thought of the century was to assume, or even note De Tocqueville's extraordinary prescience of America's opportunity and danger, without acknowledging that a spirit of genuine prophecy was still active in the world's affairs. These seers were not only endowed with the literary gift, but were also entrusted with a message fitted to their day, capable of assimilation by life, and of transformation into goodness. Since, then, it is to the former half of the century that we must look for its greatest and most significant literature, we have now to inquire as to the forerunners and heralds of this new day.

Revolution is proverbially hard to account for. We no sooner think our discovery of its origins to be satisfyingly complete than a new set of causes reveal themselves and must in turn be dealt with. I shall not attempt, therefore, to run to earth the literary influences which finally made Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, and Shelley possible, but shall be content rather to note four significant figures belonging primarily to the eighteenth century, but into

the heritage of whose influence the nineteenth century richly entered.

William Cowper was the last man in the world whom those who knew him in his lifetime could have thought to be a revolutionist; nor does he act the part any better when he is looked at in retrospect: so used have we become to associate the inception of revolution with plots, and its overt acts with gunpowder barrels, guillotines, or dynamite.

In Cowper's case the weapon was a sofa, and his fellow conspirators two eminently respectable middle-aged widows. No life could have seemed milder or less likely to make a stir in the world than Cowper's, whether we find him in youth "giggling and making giggle" with his pretty cousins in Southampton Row; or thrown into a panic of shyness by the prospect of qualifying as a reader in the House of Lords, where he might easily have attained to a modest, but in all probability a lifelong, competence; or as a man fleeing to his refuge with the kind Unwins in Huntingdon, and later still retiring to the isolation and busy idleness of Olney, there to become the neighbour of Newton and the permanent ward of Mary Unwin. No career could have been more monotonous in its outward seeming; no career in reality was ever more truly adventurous. A pathos that is real and free from sentimentality attaches to the thought of the snugness and delightful monotony of home em-

ployments, when they are remembered in loneliness or peril as some castaway attempts upon his isolated rock to frame the semblance of them out of such flotsam and jetsam as he can rescue from the sea. Yet this was Cowper's life experience. He had the material furnishings of domesticity about him from the cradle to the grave; but his capacity to enjoy them was fearfully intermittent. Amid his flower-pots, rabbit-hutches, and carpenter's tools; his walks by Ouse and tea-drinkings at home; his books and correspondents, he was still a hunted man. None could tell when morning broke whether the day were marked for peace and light, or whether the sun would go down at noon to be succeeded by a horror of great darkness.

Much has been made of the seclusion and quiet amid which Cowper did his work; of the half-effeminate willingness which he showed to live thus under shelter, and apart, not merely from the world's hubbub, but from its responsibilities. In point of fact, that Olney house and garden were like the fastness in a child's story hidden in a mountain valley or behind a screen of palms upon some coral island; delightful in its seclusion and seeming peace, but yet the abode of fear; because savage marauders threaten and means of defence are pitifully inadequate. The tragedy of such tales is often nine-tenths comedy, so sure are we that the *deus ex machina* will appear in the moment of crisis. In Cowper's life the tragic element was as constant as

it was real, and in the supreme moment there was no relief but that of death. "What can it signify?" are reported to have been his last words in response to an offer of nourishment; but after the change had come, those who stood about him noted that from the hour of death until the coffin was closed "the expression into which his countenance had settled was that of calmness and composure, mingled as it were with holy surprise."[1]

Here are all the elements of adventure and of tragedy. To see this man sleeping well after a life whose unavailing struggle for calm had made it indeed a fitful fever, may easily have seemed to illuminate his fine countenance with the light of a holy surprise.

In spite of a general impression to the contrary, Cowper's madness was in the first place no more related to religion than to the binomial theorem, as Mr. Birrell has happily reminded us. His mind was unhinged by the excitement and worry of his expected appearance at the bar of the House of Lords to qualify for a readership. The resultant shock, reacting upon a nervous system always delicate and already diseased, reduced it to a condition of chronic instability. Fits of pronounced insanity recurred, and there were several attempts at self-destruction. Yet during the greater portion of his life Cowper was sufficiently master of himself to go his own way and to do his own work, proving himself to be one

[1] Wright, *Life of William Cowper*, p. 657.

of the best of companions and perhaps the very best of correspondents. One dare not dogmatize here, but year in and year out, on week-days and Sundays alike, his letters maintain a place beside Boswell's "Life" in the first rank among publications of their own type, — books to take upon a journey, even to carry into exile, and yet to reopen with a new delight after returning to one's fireside. Where else are good breeding, good sense, good taste, affectionate raillery, a quick appreciation of beauty, a genuine and unobtrusive piety, and a deliciously keen and natural humour to be found in so perfect a combination? No one can hope to compose letters to-day in Cowper's style, but every one who must write at all would surely be not only a better writer but a better man for numbering this recluse of Olney in his list of friends.

There used to be a child's story with appropriate illustrations representing a reformed pirate who took a vine-clad cottage by the sea, and whose wont it was, when fits of Berserker rage threatened, to sit at his door and knit antimacassars. Cowper would have appreciated its drollery, for he had a keen sense of the absurd, and spent a night that was well nigh sleepless for laughter after hearing the adventure of John Gilpin, which he immortalized in verse the next day; yet behind the extravaganza he might well have seen a sombre picture of himself fighting the fiends with his pen. "Doomed, yet debonnaire," as Mr. Birrell calls him, he took to verse to save his

life, and threw his poems out that the diversion which their production and reception caused might grant him at least a respite from the wolves of his despair. The more quiet and commonplace the theme, the more suited was it to its purpose; fancy might the better play about it without danger of over-excitement, and Cowper's fancy was of just the sort to illuminate the commonplace and to give it significance. This is not strictly true, perhaps, of the "Table-Talk," where he was hampered by his acceptance of the rhymed couplet in which all would-be poets of his century aspired to jingle. But when Lady Austen came to Olney, bringing a new element of clever companionship into the poet's life, and set him to the task of writing a poem upon the sofa in their sitting-room, English literature had good cause to note the day. Forthwith this middle-aged writer of excellent verse, 'commenced poet,' as the cant phrase goes, in good earnest. He not only rejuvenated blank verse; he brought back the notes of reality and simplicity to English poetry. With facile pen, quick wit, and devout reverence for all that was true, just, pure, and lovely, whether as yet it were of good report among men or not, he wrought with glad diligence to fulfil his friend's behest. He sang of fireside joys, of the gracious companionships of home, of winter nights and noons, of walks abroad by Ouse, of ploughmen in the fields and woodmen in the forests, of wild birds, tame hares, and grazing cattle.

Nor rural sights alone, but rural sounds,
Exhilarate the spirit, and restore
The tone of languid Nature. Mighty winds,
That sweep the skirt of some far-spreading wood
Of ancient growth, make music not unlike
The dash of Ocean on his winding shore,
And lull the spirit while they fill the mind.[1]

That last line might serve as motto for a large part of Cowper's work. He who would know the poet must make acquaintance with "The Task." It is the window which permits us now to look out with him upon the world, and now to look in upon a troubled spirit seeking rest, and a mind which must needs be filled with less disquieting cargo than self-contemplation afforded, if it were to keep a straight course or avoid ultimate shipwreck. A discerning critic has called attention to the fact that

"his playful satire and tender admonition, his denunciation of slavery, his noble patriotism, his devotional earnestness and sublimity, his tenderness to animals, his affection for his pets, his warm sympathy with his fellow-men, and his exquisite paintings of domestic peace and happiness are all so much self-portraiture, drawn with the ripe skill of a master and the modesty and good taste of the man. The very rapidity of his transitions, where things light and sportive are ranged alongside the most solemn truths, is characteristic of his temperament in ordinary life."

[1] *The Task*, bk. i, vv. 181–187.

To sketch even in outline the extent and variety of Cowper's poetry is beside my present purpose. Limitations of space forbid me to say anything further of the inimitable letters — which may after all be well, since they constitute a sort of land of the lotus-eaters and threaten the further progress of him who begins to linger there. It remains therefore to speak of religion as an element in his work. It has become the fashion to divide responsibility for Cowper's mental anguish between Calvinism and John Newton. Critics have implied, when they have not argued, that if the tenets of the former had been less arduous, and the friendship of the latter more judicious, the poet might have known placid days and quiet nights in place of his fearful expectation of judgement. I have already noted the fact that religion had nothing to do with the first access of insanity. After that, and its accompanying attempt at suicide, physical conditions undoubtedly existed which doomed a man of Cowper's temperament to recurrent attacks of extreme nervous depression. Under these circumstances it was almost inevitable that something should become an obsession — preferably some very great and remote, or else some near but insignificant, matter. In Cowper's case the prevalent Calvinism of his day furnished in its doctrine of reprobation a theme precisely fitted to take tyrannous possession of his unquiet mind. It is reasonably certain that John Newton kept this doctrine among the weapons of

his theological arsenal; it is most improbable that he ever used it against William Cowper, in spite of the tradition that once he gave a partial and halting assent to the poet's fear concerning himself. Calvinists of the extreme sort have always been better than their creeds. The doctrine of reprobation has been too awful to be launched even at the heads of one's enemies, to say nothing of its hasty application to one's friends. It is reasonable to suppose that Newton felt this. He was called to preach salvation; if damnation were to be dealt out, that was God's prerogative. Newton was a brave, kind-hearted, sane, strong man, as little addicted to hysteria as John Wesley himself. There is a world of evidence to show that he was a support and stay to Cowper's troubled soul; very little to indicate that he ever wrought him up to an undue pitch of excitement. Perhaps he was somewhat too thick-skinned and masculine to deal with a temperament so delicately constituted as was the poet's; but on the other hand the sturdiness of his robust faith was better fitted to Cowper's need than the fussy sympathy of a sentimentalist could have been. It is worthy of note, too, that Newton's criticism of Cowper's literary work has something to commend it, and that his judgement upon the attempt to translate Homer has been approved by posterity, though upon different ground from that which he maintained. This ex-slave-captain was something of a prodigy; but I incline to believe that the in-

tricacies and probable contradictions in his life and character have been more clearly discerned and far more judiciously estimated by Sir James Stephen than by Mrs. Oliphant.[1]

Let this be as it may, however, it remains true of Cowper that, if a theological obsession were his bane, religion was his blessing. He was the son of a clergyman. His "Lines to my Mother's Picture" — lines which Tennyson professed himself unable to read without tears — remain to assure us of his filial piety. They speak, too, in vivid terms of his own religious hope and fear. He pictures himself as a ship voyaging toward the haven to which his parents had attained, thwarted by head winds, buffeted by the waves, vexed by confused and confusing currents.

> Yet oh the thought, that thou art safe, and he!
> That thought is joy, arrive what may to me.

Thus, as through the bars of a prison-house, which the theology of his day had built around him, — a magnificent and terrible structure, for as an artist Calvin is comparable only to Michael Angelo, — we seem to hear a spirit in touch with the heart of Christianity. So, in his hymns, there is to be caught now and then this same note of possible but scarcely to be expected joy.

> Sometimes a light surprises
> The Christian while he sings;

[1] Cf. Stephen, *Essays in Ecclesiastical Biography*, ii, 99–121; Oliphant, *Literary History of England*, i, 43–49.

It is the Lord who rises
With healing in his wings;
When comforts are declining,
He grants the soul again
A season of clear shining,
To cheer it after rain.[1]

It is like honest Thomas translated from the first into the eighteenth century, — a man who forecast evil, but whom blessing always surprised. Yet it would be very misleading to suppose that the note of religious melancholy is dominant in Cowper's poetry. The faith which it voices is generally calm and strong, if not robust. Sometimes it approaches the dogmatic, as in the celebrated lines upon "Voltaire and the Lace-Worker," who

Just knows, and knows no more, her Bible true —
A truth the brilliant Frenchman never knew;
And in that charter reads, with sparkling eyes,
Her title to a treasure in the skies.

There is also a passage in "Hope" presaging in notably vigourous verse the great missionary adventure which was to characterize the next century.

That sound bespeaks salvation on her way,
The trumpet of a life-restoring day;
'T is heard where England's eastern glory shines,
And in the gulfs of her Cornubian mines.
And still it spreads. See Germany send forth
Her sons to pour it on the frozen north;

[1] This hymn has sometimes been ascribed to Newton, but probably only because it is to be found in the volume of Olney Hymns. The evidence for Cowper's authorship seems conclusive.

Fired with a zeal peculiar, they defy
The rage and rigour of a polar sky,
And plant successfully sweet Sharon's rose
On icy plains and in eternal snows.

A spark of adventure glowed in the poet's soul to which the heroism of the Moravians sent back a kindred gleam. He was a diligent and delighted reader of books of travel, speaking somewhere in his letters of how wide the range of his vicarious wandering had been; and everywhere he carried his love of God, together with a devoted but candid patriotism.

England, with all thy faults, I love thee still,

is a line not less characteristic than noble.

It is indeed in this atmosphere of candour and courage, warmed and sweetened by faith, hope, and love, lightened by the play of keen yet kindly humour, and invigourated by an ever-present reverence for duty, that the genuine religious element in Cowper's work is to be found. The explicit piety is never to be overlooked as a natural expression of religious sentiment; but the implicit reverence for all good things and sympathy with all right endeavour is the main evidence of it. "Is not 'The Task' a glorious poem?" enquired Robert Burns, who knew what pure and undefiled religion was, however half-hearted his own attempts to incarnate it may sometimes have been. "The religion of 'The Task,' bating a few scraps of Calvinistic divinity, is the religion of God and Nature; the religion

that exalts, that ennobles man."[1] No less competent a judge and notable an heretic than George Eliot pays similar and even more explicit tribute to the same poem. "Where," she asks, "is the poem that surpasses the 'Task' in the genuine love it breathes, at once towards inanimate and animate existence — in truthfulness of perception and sincerity of presentation — in the calm gladness that springs from a delight in objects for their own sake, without self-reference — in divine sympathy with the lowliest pleasures, with the most short-lived capacity for pain. . . . No object is too small to prompt his song — not the sooty film on the bars, or the spoutless teapot holding a bit of mignonette that serves to cheer the dingy town lodging with a 'hint that Nature lives'; and yet his song is never trivial, for he is alive to small objects, not because his mind is narrow, but because his glance is clear and his heart is large."[2]

There is profit in setting these judgements of two persons whose critical competence in literary matters will not be lightly questioned beside the dictum of the historian of the Evangelical Revival.

"It would be scarcely claiming too much," says Canon Overton, "if we set down the whole of Cowper's original poetry . . . as belonging to the literature of the Evangelical Revival. . . . In the

[1] Letter to Mrs. Dunlop, Dec. 25, 1793; *Robert Burns and Mrs. Dunlop*, ii, 265.

[2] Essay on *Worldliness and Other-Worldliness.*

productions of his elegant pen we should, under any circumstances, have recognized at least the *disjecta membra poetæ*. But, as a matter of fact, his Christian convictions were the mainspring which set the whole machinery of his poetical work in motion. It was this which gave coherence and symmetry and soul to it all. Abstract the religious element from his compositions, and they all fall to pieces; but, in fact, it is impossible to do so. With the exception of one or two lighter pieces, there is an undercurrent of Christian sentiment running through and inseparable from them all." [1]

No doubt the question has arisen in some minds as to the source of Cowper's delightful sense of humour, and the legitimacy of its association with his profound religious convictions on the one hand and his haunting melancholy upon the other. The association between humour and melancholy is natural enough, since the latter may be said to be little more than the former hypertrophied and passed into an obsession. 'A sense of humour,' as I shall have occasion to note at some length in a later chapter, is but a phrase for a keen appreciation of life's little incongruities and a disposition to hold them resolutely subject to a larger plan. The humourous man consents to be amused and desires to amuse others by casual attention bestowed upon small interruptions of the normal order of his thought or of his day, especially when an element

[1] *Evangelical Revival in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 127.

of the unexpected or the absurd appears in them. Most good-tempered people know what it is to meet a succession of insignificant *contretemps*, at the first and second of which they are disposed to give way to vexation; but as the number grows, the sense of being in a 'plight' grows, too. If the plight be merely absurd, victory over threatened sourness of temper is won with an honest laugh at one's self. If it be serious, the disturbance of mind may deepen into melancholy. When the incongruities of life come to be regarded as ironies, purposeful and cruel contradictions of fate, then the sense of humour atrophies and practically dies; as witness the later novels of Mr. Hardy, from which all the radiance of humour which illuminated "Far from the Madding Crowd" and "Under the Greenwood Tree" seems to have evaporated. The reason is that, when all life's little incongruities have become signs of Fate's malevolence, the Universe grows too grim for laughter or for that quiet amusement which is even better. Indeed, in such circumstances, one no longer has a right to speak of the Universe, since cosmos has given place to chaos once again. Humour of a sane, good-tempered, gracious sort is indissolubly linked to faith. It need not, of course, be a perfectly coördinated or confessed faith; but the relation is sufficiently close, define it as we may, to leave wholesome mirth without support or stay when faith in God and man is overthrown. Illustrations of this will not be

wanting as we go on together. It is sufficient now to note the fact that Cowper's humour, evident enough in his verse, but shining with an effulgence of perpetual delight in his letters, belongs to his faith.[1]

Of course this is only another way of saying that he was gifted with a fine and true sense of proportion, doing all things, when he was himself, decently and in order. Thus he was able to dignify little matters and commonplace occurrences into proper subjects for verse, introducing thereby a new note into the poetry of his century. The thing has perhaps never been better put than by Anne Grant in a letter written some five and twenty years after the poet's death. "Yet there are blockheads . . . that will say, 'What do the public care for his stockings, or for his oysters, or for the cake that came in its native pans, or the heartless hens that refused to lay eggs to make another cake?' I would have such persons know that a Cowper moving in the light of his mental beauty and modest sanctity irradiates every object that is in contact with him; it is their oysters and cakes that are insignificant, because they are so themselves."[2]

[1] I do not forget the late T. E. Brown's strictures upon what he is pleased to think Cowper's tendency to sit in Pharisaical judgement upon those who differed from him; but that gifted Manxman's equal capacity for prejudice and strong language practically rules him out of court in such a case as this.

[2] *Memoir and Correspondence of Anne Grant.* Quoted from Moulton's *Library of Literary Criticism*, iv, p. 383.

A century of letters bears testimony to the significance of Cowper's life and work. He reintroduced in a perfectly simple and natural manner the religious note into literature. He became the inspiration of more than one later poet, as Mrs. Browning's "Cowper's Grave," and the passionate verses of Anne Brontë testify. More than this, he became the accepted poet of the English Evangelicals, bringing sweetness and light into many middle-class English homes where reawakened piety, threatening to degenerate into a new asceticism, needed him sorely enough. To become the poet of a school or sect is one of the severest tests to which an author can be put. It is significant of the genuine quality of Cowper's poetic gift and the soundness of his piety that practically all his verses still ring clear and true; and that we would not sacrifice even such tragic lines as those wrung out of his despair by the story of Anson's sailor swept overboard in mid-ocean to a fate which seemed but a mild presage of his own. There is perhaps no sadder stanza in English poetry than —

> No voice divine the storm allay'd,
> No light propitious shone,
> When snatched from all effectual aid,
> We perished, each alone;
> But I beneath a rougher sea,
> And whelm'd in deeper gulfs than he.[1]

The voice is Cowper's and the hand that wrote was

[1] *Poems*, x, 98, Southey's edition.

his; but the inspirer of the verse was that strange spirit of despair who plagued him for so long, casting him, like the demoniac of old, into the water and the fire, and forcing him, in efforts to rid himself of such possession, to perform some of the most significant and telling work of his own century; work which was destined moreover to prove to be an emancipation proclamation to the next.

A well-known critic not long since began a review of the poet whom we are next to consider with the words, "We are done with Crabbe." He very likely intended to state a lamentable fact rather than a judgement; otherwise the phrase would deserve to be pilloried beside the "This will never do," wherewith Jeffrey greeted Wordsworth. Even as a statement of fact, however, one may take issue with Professor Woodberry's dictum; for there is scarce a poet of his century whose keenness of observation, sense of human values, and consciousness of what we rather blindly call 'the Social Question,' render him so germane to our own day as this "Pope in worsted stockings." Some one has sketched his sturdy figure as in old age he came in from a botanizing excursion with his hands full of wayside flowers or weeds. Nothing could be more significant or characteristic than those weeds in Crabbe's firm and sympathetic grasp. There was no touch of sentimentality in the interest which they aroused; but they grew beside his path; there was meaning, explicit or latent, in them; and Crabbe

cared. He cared to know what they were; to inquire into the bane or blessing of which they were capable; it may be that he cared just because other people did not seem to care. That at least appears often to have been his principle of selection in choosing the subjects for his poems. Life's highways and hedges furnished him with tragedy and comedy — though with far more of the former than the latter.

Crabbe knew the lot of the poor at first hand. Bred to drudgery in a little east-coast fishing town, and later apprenticed to a surgeon or apothecary, his first attempts to get on in the world met with bitter discouragement. His rash adventure in attempting London life with little more than the traditional shilling in his pocket, was an invitation to disaster; and irretrievable disaster might have come had it not been for the aid of Edmund Burke in his extremity. None of that great man's good deeds becomes him better than the help he gave this struggling poet. Crabbe finally took orders and became a diligent, if not a zealous, minister of the Church of England. His "Village," which is far removed from Goldsmith's "Sweet Auburn," and the "Parish Register" give us a picture of the pathos and tragedy of humble life worth setting beside the great work of his contemporary Sir Frederick Eden on "The State of the Poor." Even in his later poems, like "Tales of the Hall," in which he seems to deal with the more fortunate classes, Crabbe is still keen to perceive and quick to sympathize with

poverty. When the two brothers who are the protagonists of the simple drama approach their meeting after many years of separation, the younger soliloquizes: —

> "How shall I now my unknown way explore,
> He proud and rich — I very proud and poor?"

When they have met, grown accustomed to each other, and sit at ease over wine and walnuts in the elder's well-appointed dining-room, the talk recurs to old schoolmates or village acquaintances who have felt the world's rough hand. There is no blemish of condescension or patronage. All is direct, simple, and honestly sympathetic, as well as sane with a sanity which will not permit a trace of false sentiment. The tears in the story of Ruth are genuine *lachrymæ rerum;* and nothing could be truer to life than the narrative of the poor boy of moderate talent, patronized and partly educated by a nobleman who cast him off when the youth began to think himself a genius and to nurse an ambition for an artist's career.

> Years passed away, and where he lived, and how,
> Was then unknown — indeed we know not now;
> But once at twilight walking up and down,
> In a poor alley of the mighty town,
> Where, in her narrow courts and garrets, hide
> The grieving sons of Genius, Want and Pride,
> I met him musing: sadness I could trace,
> And conquer'd hope's meek anguish, in his face.[1]

It is doubtful if our speech contains another phrase

[1] *Tales of the Hall*, book iii.

so competent to sum up the tragedy of ambitious and disappointed mediocrity as that "conquer'd hope's meek anguish."

Crabbe's poetry, it will be seen, is not exactly diverting according to modern standards, — though he was a chief favourite with such potent lords of literature as Byron, Scott, and Newman, — but it is none the less interesting and profitable for any one who would know the world in which he lives and who would grapple with the problem of its inequalities of privilege. It is religious in the deep sense in which the prophecy of Amos or the parable of Dives and Lazarus may be called religious; and it shares their convicting power. Even at this distance it is hard to read the story of the Village Workhouse, with its portrayal —

> Of the cold charities of man to man, —

or the sketch of Isaac Ashford in the "Parish Register," without an awakening of the 'social conscience'; or, let it be added, an honest thanksgiving that we have made some progress in the intervening century. Ashford is a noble and pathetic figure which none but a country clergyman could have drawn. Although his life had been one of strict and industrious integrity, —

> At length he found, when seventy years were run,
> His strength departed and his labour done;
> When he, save honest fame, retained no more,
> But lost his wife, and saw his children poor:
> 'T was then, a spark of — say not discontent —
> Struck on his mind, and thus he gave it vent: —

"Kind are your laws ('t is not to be denied),
That in yon House, for ruin'd age, provide,
. . . . . .
Why then this proud reluctance to be fed,
To join your poor and eat the parish-bread?"
. . . . . .
Such were his thoughts, and so resign'd he grew;
Daily he placed the Workhouse in his view![1]

Grave economic objections can be made against any general scheme of old-age pensions; American experience with military pensions leads even the friendly critic to look askance at the system just inaugurated in Great Britain; but those of its advocates who know their Crabbe will never lack a telling argument; nor will their opponents fail to discover a considerable burden of proof laid upon their shoulders whenever they are called upon to face Isaac Ashford. He helps us to understand what Tennyson meant when, in expressing his liking for Crabbe, he said, "There is a tramp, tramp, tramp, a merciless sledge-hammer thud about his lines which suits his subjects."

The moment that we turn to Burns all this is changed, though the change is, after all, of manner rather than of matter. One may advance this claim without forgetting that in literature, and especially in poetry, manner is much, and that in passing from Crabbe to Burns we seem to master a new element and to spring from earth to air. Crabbe was a realist and inspired to plod, though after

[1] *The Parish Register*, part iii.

such a fashion that something of the beauty and terror of an army with banners attends his march. Burns was inspired to sing and fly, and is most master of himself as well as of his art while exercising his lyric gift.

Never perhaps has a great poet revealed himself so unreservedly in his verse. Except for the fact that much which the world has seen was never meant for its eye, but written for himself alone, as his brother Gilbert assures us, whole sections of his poetry would scarce be endurable. As it is, the reader not infrequently sympathizes with Keats, who shrank from such excess of self-revelation while he felt its fascination to the full. "We can see horribly clear in the work of such a man," he wrote in one of his letters, "his whole life as if we were God's spies."

That life is too well known to require any sketch of its incidents here. It reminds us anew of the mysterious catholicity which the Spirit of all Truth exercises in the choice of his instruments, using sometimes the weak, sometimes the obdurate, and always the partial. Burns was as far as possible from being obdurate or stubborn; but he was weak, and the manliness which is one of his noblest and sweetest characteristics sometimes failed him lamentably. To claim that "The Cottar's Saturday Night" represents his best gift to literature might lay me open to the accusation of subordinating critical faculty to the convenience of my present theme.

Yet the testimony of no less a critic than Scott's biographer can be cited for the defence. Lockhart is very confident that the loss of this one poem would be perhaps the most serious that the poet's fame could endure, were such loss possible. The reader needs but to recall it to feel how representative it is of the best in Burns's experience and how profound and genuine was the religious feeling which inspired it. In his sanest moments there never was a saner man. He knew where the hidings of Scotland's power lay, and whence the source of his own largest opportunities came — out of the sturdy, independent, godly training received from his parents, and which was in a sense characteristic of the Scots Presbyterian peasantry. That training in self-respecting manliness, with the Scriptures and the Shorter Catechism to vouch for its validity, Burns never forgot. When at his best, he generally echoes the spirit of it. To be sure, —

> He feels the force,
> The treacherous undertow and stress,
> Of wayward passions, and no less
> The keen remorse.
>
> At moments, wrestling with his fate,
> His voice is harsh, but not with hate;
> The brushwood hung
> Above the tavern door lets fall
> Its bitter leaf, its drop of gall,
> Upon his tongue.
>
> But still the music of his song
> Rises o'er all, elate and strong;

Its master chords
Are Manhood, Freedom, Brotherhood;
Its discords but an interlude
Between the words.[1]

As so often happens in both literature and life, the religious element in Burns shows to best advantage when it is implicit. He hated hypocrisy, and, like many a conscience-smitten man, exalted his hatred into a special virtue. "Holy Willie's Prayer," for instance, is a diatribe acrid enough to have come from the pen of Churchill or of Junius. It is an attack upon ultra-Calvinism in general, — which was sufficiently justifiable; and upon a certain William Fisher in particular, — which nothing could justify. So in the "Holy Fair," with its innuendoes and personalities, there is far less Christian spirit than in the rollicking stanzas of the "Jolly Beggars," a poem which for genuine inspiration must take precedence of the far more famous "Tam o' Shanter." But the "Lines to a Mountain Daisy," to the mouse whose poor home was invaded by his ploughshare, the closing stanzas of his "Address to the Unco Guid," and especially —

A man's a man for a' that

are instinct with the very spirit of the Gospel. Somewhere this man

[1] H. W. Longfellow, *Robert Burns*.
As originally printed in *Harper's Magazine* for 1880, the last stanza began, —

But still the burden of his song
Is love of right, disdain of wrong.

learned the touch that speeds
Right to the natural heart of things;
Struck rootage down to where Life feeds
At the eternal Springs.

It is not without hesitation that one writes down William Blake as a mystic; not but that mysticism of a sort played a part in his strange mental and spiritual experience, but because we have fallen into the notion that such experience is typical of mysticism. The genuine mystic is simply a person of keen spiritual perceptions to whom the Immanent Soul of the Universe seems very near and real. He looks askance at trances on the one hand, as he extends but a dubious welcome to rituals upon the other, and always he is suspicious of hysteria, though possibly willing to admit that life subject to hysterical seizures is better than stark death. The genuine mystical element in Blake consists in his God-consciousness rather than in his tendency to dream dreams, to see visions, and to babble with tongues. His claim to sanity may be questioned; so may his claim to the possession of the clear flame of genius; yet sparks of genius illumine his work both in literature and art. He has aroused some enthusiasms and inspired some disciples — at least to appropriate his ideas. He was a man of weird visions, ecstasies, and revelations, which were never quite plain to him and which he could therefore never adequately reveal to others. Possessed as he was by a sort of religious demon, he wrote some poetry

and made some drawings which are wonderfully suggestive in their partial and inchoate state; and he left two or three exquisite lyrics which can scarcely fail of immortality. In the "Reeds of Innocence" he incorporates with something of Stevenson's naturalness and simplicity that child-like spirit which is the essence of religion.

Piping down the valleys wild,
Piping songs of pleasant glee,
On a cloud I saw a child,
And he laughing said to me:

"Pipe a song about a Lamb!"
So I piped with merry cheer.
"Piper, pipe that song again";
So I piped: he wept to hear.

"The Tyger" suggests in inimitable phrase the mystery of cruelty and death in Nature.

Tyger, Tyger, burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

. . . . . .

When the stars threw down their spears,
And watered Heaven with their tears,
Did He smile His work to see?
Did He who made the Lamb, make thee?

Perhaps the best characterization of Blake is that contained in the little poem bearing his name by James Thomson.

He came to the desert of London town,
Grey miles long;

He wandered up and he wandered down,
Singing a quiet song.
He came to the desert of London town,
Mirk miles broad;
He wandered up and he wandered down,
Ever alone with God.

Thus, at what may seem to be somewhat disproportionate length, I have sketched the dawn of the new day in English poetry. These four men, of whom Cowper and Crabbe seem to belong to the eighteenth century, as Burns and Blake do to the nineteenth, all suggest in their different ways the opportunity lying before the student of the religious implications of our literature, — its religious implications, I repeat, because in literature, as elsewhere in life, it is the implicit religion which counts and which finally determines religious expression.

Cowper with his keen eye, humourous smile, and tender heart; Crabbe, the realist, —

Nature's sternest painter, yet the best, —

(to quote again Lord Byron's rather hackneyed tribute), depicting life in low and sombre lights, yet never cynically; Burns, singing his new song; and Blake, piping his thin but haunting melody, all bear witness to the ineradicable influence of religion upon literature. I am not concerned just now to attempt the definition of that influence, but am content to note it as we pass on to observe two great leaders in the literary achievement of the new century.

CHAPTER III

SONS OF THE MORNING: WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE

Matthew Arnold once observed that, while Wordsworth's poetry had failed of the recognition it deserves, still it had not wanted eulogists; "and it may be said to have brought its eulogists luck, for almost every one who has praised Wordsworth's poetry has praised it well." No better illustration of the truth of this remark could be cited than the filial and illuminating estimate wherewith Matthew Arnold himself prefaced the little volume of Wordsworth selections edited by him some five and twenty years ago. It is so sane and rare a bit of criticism that I could perhaps best attain my present purpose by asking the reader to renew acquaintance with it, and then to draw his own conclusions concerning the poet's testimony to my thesis; for it is only honest to confess that I cannot bring myself to speak of Wordsworth with the detachment and coolness of judgement becoming to the present task. That very edition of his poems is the volume which, next perhaps to the Bible, Shakespeare, and Boswell's Johnson, I should choose to take into exile with me, unless indeed I threw discretion to the

winds, and chose instead the poems which Matthew Arnold did not choose; since the true Wordsworth lover would not willingly give up the "Prelude" and "Excursion." I remember the famous anecdote of Macaulay's challenge to the company of 'literary persons' who were praising the "Prelude," which resulted in the discovery that he himself was the only man in the room who had read the poem; nor do I forget the dubious praise which the sprightly Elizabeth, of "German Garden" fame, bestows upon it in her "Adventures in Rügen." She commends it as an ideal companion for the traveller, inasmuch as the reading can be begun at any point without special effort and interrupted with as little disappointment. Both it and the "Excursion" are poems which unquestionably minister to composure rather than to excitement, and doubtless there have been readers whose composure has deepened into slumber. Wordsworth is not infrequently prosaic and occasionally commonplace. None but a Wordsworthian fanatic — by which I mean that type of devotee who seems bent upon spoiling poetry by making it the theme of toilsome study, exaggerated comment, and indiscriminate praise; the type that is forever organizing 'clubs,' and at whose hands Browning has suffered so many things — can overlook his famous line, —

A Mr. Wilkinson, a clergyman,

which another great poet used to quote as perhaps

the feeblest in literature. He was unquestionably deficient in humour. He was possibly deficient in passion, though such as know him best do not feel the lack. But none the less his eyes saw the beatific vision, —

> Of truth, of grandeur, beauty, love and hope,
> And melancholy fear subdued by faith,
> Of blessed consolations in distress,
> Of moral strength and intellectual power,
> Of joy in widest commonalty spread.

He had the faculty of perceiving the universal significance of common things. Less gifted than his contemporary Coleridge in respect of pure fancy, his imagination was, I believe, more exactly attuned to the music of life as it is than that of any other English poet with the possible exception of Shakespeare:

> The still sad music of humanity,
> Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
> To chasten and subdue.

One hesitates to quote again lines already in such danger of being worn threadbare; yet there is something about them which, like great and familiar passages of Scripture, assures perennial renewal of their youth. However hardly used, they seem commonplace only in the mouths of shallow and shifty persons whose main intellectual resource is the catchword of a day; restored to their rightful context the floods of the Spirit once more pulse through them and their old soul-compelling power returns. To set these well-known lines in the forefront of

Wordsworth's message is not to imply that either his thinking or his writing was mainly in a minor key. The subdued and sombre has its frequent place, but the dominant note is that of calm and patient confidence, — the victory which overcometh the world being his faith. Who else has ever interpreted Nature with so clear a perception of the distinction between the body and soul of it? He delights in the outward semblance, in the nodding and beckoning of the daffodils to the welcome Spring, and yet gains from the meanest flower that blows thoughts too deep for tears. Thus Nature is never divorced from life. It always has, when rightly read, an immediate and normal influence —

> On that best portion of a good man's life,
> His little, nameless, unremembered acts
> Of kindness and of love.

Men who touch it with the finger of faith find it to be the very garment of God whose hem shall heal them; and sometimes it is swept aside for a moment in order that the Real Presence may appear. This is

> that blessed mood,
> In which the burden of the mystery,
> In which the heavy and the weary weight
> Of all this unintelligible world,
> Is lightened; that serene and blessed mood,
> In which the affections gently lead us on, —
> Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
> And even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body and become a living soul.

Such is the mysticism of Wordsworth. He sees things as they are; he feels the common human joys and griefs: the song of the highland reaper, like Ruth of old among the sheaves; the burden upon the bent shoulders of the poor leech-gatherer gleaning a precarious livelihood from the moorland pools; the tragedy of Michael, the pathos of which appeals to the reader as deeper and more compelling than that of Enoch Arden by so much as the story itself lies more clearly within the range of common experience; the loneliness of the heath after the passing of the child whose solitary playground it has been; the haunting intimations of a higher destiny and a richer life than this world can make room for; and the clear tones in which through the mysteries of present experience the voice of duty speaks, — of all these diverse yet related things he is wonderfully conscious. They belong together in his thought, and their unifying principle is the Reason and the Love of God.

The secret of Wordsworth is not far to seek; and yet, when found, one is tempted to say that its full significance can be appreciated only by those whose experience has taught them the charm as well as the ache of loneliness. Whether this loneliness be that of solitude, or the yet more poignant isolation sometimes felt in cities and strange assemblies, is of no particular moment. Wordsworth's poetry more frequently voices the former; though the sonnet upon Westminster Bridge breathes

something of the latter. But, whether alone or amid a throng, the poet always felt himself to be a living soul in vital touch with the soul of Nature. This is the answer, the more than sufficient answer, to be made to those who talk of Wordsworth's "pantheism." No word could well be further from expressing his religion and philosophy. In pantheism the deity is so identified with Nature that he can be said to live only in the visible activities of the world and to be conscious only in the consciousness of man. Wordsworth shows no trace of sympathy with so narrow and partial a scheme of thought. On the contrary, the great bulk of his work is so inspired by faith in a Personal Power resident in the world and at work through its activities, that in a peculiar sense he stands related at once to the Greek with his haunting idea of the *genius loci*, and to the modern Christian rejoicing in his faith in an Immanent God.

In "The Excursion" he has set forth with fine sympathy and discrimination the naturalness of the old pagan view — which was, after all, but partly wrong. Greek polytheism was a partial and inadequate attempt to express the soul's instinctive consciousness of the wealth of personal life in the Universe. The Greeks felt that, wherever events took place, — especially notable, essential, and recurrent events like the sun's rising, setting, and stately progress through the zodiac, — there was an interplay of cause and effect which bespoke

the presence of will. The presence of will necessarily implied the presence of a person. They were right. The world of law to which we have been introduced by modern science is but a restatement in terms of general and scientific interrelation of what their mythology attempted to express in terms of real but unrelated experience. They ascribed the steadfast glory and beneficence of the sun's progress to Apollo; the phenomena of the sea to the will of Poseidon; the waxing and waning of the moon to the virgin huntress. They failed to be true to the principle of religious development in too completely isolating these divinities and swamping the deeper significance of their religion in the intrigues and devices of Olympus. The relation of events thus hinged upon the interrelation of passionate and often petty people; and no doubt the intricacy of phenomena which appear sometimes to make up a sort of "cosmic weather," might lend some justification to their scheme. Science has resolved these contradictions and diversities. She assures us that there is no room in the Universe for whim or prejudice, — no committee of gods who may agree upon a certain course, or may break up in petulant confusion and go their several ways to visit their favourites with such blessing, and their enemies with such bane, as are possible to their strength and cleverness. The cosmic scheme of science is one of —

Interdependence, absolute, foreseen, ordained, decreed.

It tends to express itself in the formulas of mechanics; its ideal is that of a perfectly articulated machine. Hence modern science is contemptuous toward Greek thought, and especially toward Greek thought upon religion. It too often proceeds upon the implicit hypothesis if not the blatant dogma that the Universe has no room for personality. What seems to be a person is a delusion and free will is a snare.

Against such belittling of life as this Wordsworth resolutely set his face. The world in which he found himself was more than a dead machine. The men and women who inhabited it were more than empty and insignificant phenomena. The foundation of his joy in the goodly frame of earth which he observed so closely was laid in his confidence that a Spirit inhabited and pervaded it. So far from being a pantheist in the technical sense, he was simply clairvoyant to God's immanence. His child playing upon the heath —

> Shall feel an overseeing power
> To kindle or restrain.

The mountain crags and caves give similar testimony to his Wanderer: —

> Even in their fixed and steady lineaments
> He traced an ebbing and a flowing mind,
> Expression ever varying!

Most notable of all, perhaps, is the passage in Book IV of "The Excursion," in which he pictures the

child far inland, holding to his ear the shell whose murmur speaks of its bond of union with the distant sea.

> Even such a shell the Universe itself
> Is to the ear of faith.

It would be wearisome to multiply instances so easily recalled by every chance acquaintance of the poet whose reading has included "Tintern Abbey"; but the impression that personality is the ultimate fact in a rational world grows upon the reader as he notes the place which Wordsworth gives to men and women in his theory and practice of poetry. As has been suggested, he was a lonely man. The very traditions preserved among the Cumberland peasants show him to us in his walks so absorbed in his thought and art as to be oblivious to those about him. Like Mr. Kipling's hero, he went forth —

> For to possess, in loneliness,
> The joy of all the earth.[1]

But this joy of the earth is never quite perfect except as it is related to the living soul. Wordsworth loved nothing better than some field or heath, valley or mountain, which, beautiful in itself, should yet take on a higher beauty though framing a soul's experience.

He was less a poet of the village than of the isolated cottage; of the group of playing children

[1] *To the True Romance.*

than of the lonely but contented girl upon her heath, whose very ghost, returning to its old haunts after her death,

> Sings a solitary song
> That whistles in the wind.

He rarely depicts, except incidentally, any company of workers in the fields, but loves the shepherd upon the hills, facing sun and storm with equal mind, and the solitary reaper singing at her work.

> Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
> And sings a melancholy strain.

Yet "melancholy" is too pronounced a word. There is nothing sad in the picture. It stands rather as a perpetual reminder of autumn sunlight, wholesome toil, and honest contentment. Let the song of the girl be what it will, —

> Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
> For old, unhappy, far-off things,
> And battles long ago:
> Or is it some more humble lay
> Familiar matter of to-day?
> Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain
> That has been, and may be again?

Still it is as soothing as the crooning of a child, alone but happy in its play. Sometimes, to be sure, the loneliness is tragic, as in the case of Michael, sitting lamentably by the unfinished sheepfold of which his only son had laid the cornerstone before leaving home for the city that was to be his ruin;

or of Margaret, in her desolate and decaying house on the wide common over which her half-crazed eyes were strained in search of the soldier-husband who did not come; but not less often there is the cheer of health and heartiness in these pictures. The reader finds himself wondering whether a more wholesome figure was ever painted than that of the old woodman in Book VII of "The Excursion," the man "of cheerful yesterdays and confident to-morrows."

It is significant that Wordsworth not only felt the physical health of this sturdy soul but realized that there was a genuine spiritual quality in his cheerfulness.

> Nor will, I trust, the Majesty of Heaven
> Reject the incense offered up by him,
> Though of the kind which beasts and birds present
> In grove or pasture; cheerfulness of soul,
> From trepidation and repining free.

Even more notable is the fashion in which here and always the lonely human creature dominates and gives character to the landscape in which he is set. For Wordsworth the Soul remains to the end the significant thing. Nature is after all a setting for the life of man. Granting for the moment that it be a machine, man is still the pulse of it and bound to dominate its existence in increasing measure according as he cultivates and exercises reason and will.[1]

[1] "She was a Phantom of Delight."

Thus it comes to pass that the high ethical quality of Wordsworth is a natural outflow of his faith in God and man ; and didactic passages, when they occur, are recognized as incidents in the stream of his song. The inspired peddler in " The Excursion " sometimes mounts the pulpit, to be sure ; and now and then, as in the " Parable for Fathers," the generally sweet simplicity of the poet becomes fairly stolid in its persistent thrusting of a moral upon the unwilling reader. It is needless to say that unimaginative souls are not wanting, to whom these occasional lapses into homiletic prose have provided weapons which it is their delight to wield. Matthew Arnold's witness to this is that of one who had suffered. He is speaking of the apostrophe to education in the latter part of " The Excursion," which begins, —

> O for the coming of that glorious time
> When, prizing knowledge as her noblest wealth, etc.

" One can hear them being quoted," he continues, " at a Social Science Congress ; one can call up the whole scene. A great room in one of our dismal provincial towns ; dusty air and jaded afternoon daylight ; benches full of men with bald heads and women in spectacles ; an orator lifting up his face from a manuscript written within and without, to declaim these lines of Wordsworth ; and in the soul of any poor child of nature who may have wandered in thither an unutterable sense of lamentation and mourning and woe."

It is not in such passages as these that Wordsworth makes his deepest ethical impress upon us. His best teaching is incidental. His mind possessed in a notable degree —

> that apprehensive power
> By which she is made quick to recognize
> The moral properties and scope of things.

Hence his plain men and women serve to find our souls. Take for instance this picture of three score and ten : —

> but his was now
> The still contentedness of seventy years.
> Calm did he sit under the wide-spread tree
> Of his old age ;

and put beside it the beauty and serenity of the deaf dalesman's story as told in Book VII of "The Excursion." Here is a man cut off from intercourse with his fellows through infirmity, who grew up —

> From year to year in loneliness of soul,
> . . . . . .
> Yet, by the solace of his own pure thoughts
> Upheld, he duteously pursued the round
> Of rural labours.

There is nothing sordid about the picture. The daily drudgery is relieved by the companionship of books, and the whole round of humble life is dignified by a resolution of soul which made cheerful conquest of adverse circumstance.

"It is wholesome as maize," said Emerson, of Longfellow's "Hiawatha." The figure is apt to

Wordsworth's ethical teaching. He was not blind to life's puzzle and contradiction. In "The Redbreast and the Butterfly" appears a characteristic notice of the problem of struggle and death in Nature. It is the problem of Blake's "Tyger, Tyger," yet with this difference, that Wordsworth's hunter is no fierce and bloodthirsty carnivore, but the most gentle and neighbourly of birds. He saw also, although at some distance and not too vividly, the essential factors in the complicated social problem of his own and every day. Sometimes his comment is dry and general, seasoned with a spice of irony, as when one of his characters is robbed of "competence, and her obsequious shadow, peace of mind." Again, he utters a clear and unmistakeable note of protest against the intolerable conditions of child-labour in the factories whose smoke was then beginning to blacken England. He was responsive to the world-shaking politics of his day, and there is a passage in Book VII of "The Excursion" which sets forth the phenomenon of Napoleon, — a ploughshare rending the encrusted sward of an old and barren field in order that new harvests might be sown and garnered there, — which is worth comparison with Goethe's famous estimate of Napoleon as a dæmonic power, to which I shall have occasion to recur in the next chapter.

But his clearest and most characteristic note was sounded when he sang of the progress which man was making in the subjugation of the world. Se-

cluded as his own life was, he yet watched with keen interest the victories of invention and the advance in industrial arts. He did not rail at the changes in the face of England, where villages were growing into cities, while the footpaths and shady lanes were in process of transformation into roads. More keen-eyed and catholic than Ruskin in this respect, he recognized all these to be the bittersweet incidents of genuine human growth and self-fulfilment. He could not share the complacency of those who rejoiced in these signs of temporal prosperity in themselves. Yet he exulted, "casting reserve away," in man's mastery of the elementary forces of nature. It was a splendid struggle which his fellows were waging with the powers of matter; and the victory seemed assured as, in increasing degree earth, air, and water yielded their secrets and listened to the commands of their new overlord. But — and here the Wordsworthian note recurs and recurs again — the victory over matter can never be genuine and complete until man learns —

> though late, that all true glory rests,
> All praise, all safety, and all happiness,
> Upon the moral law.

This is something far more comprehensive and natural to man than any rules of conduct codified and enjoined upon him by external authority. It is the recognition of that kinship which exists between man and God, the realization of the divine image in human life. Conscience is —

God's most intimate presence in the soul,
And His most perfect image in the world.

Hence a science which "simply remarking outward things, with formal inference ends," [1] can never do for man all that is needful. It can never supply the place even of a partial and somewhat superstitious religion. Man, in spite of all, will still persist in the inquiry as to what he shall do to be saved. Unless his soul be fed, he will still find himself inadequate to the demands of life and death. These can be met only as he recognizes his relation to God and consents to do God's will. Having made this momentous decision as the law of duty thrusts it upon him, his soul —

can therefore move
Through each vicissitude of loss and gain
Linked in entire complacence with her choice.

There can be no question but that Wordsworth felt his own mission as a poet to be profoundly religious. He somewhere says that he cannot hope for wide popularity, simply because nineteen out of every twenty people are so anxious for the consideration of society that they have no eyes or ears for any other divinity ; while poetry, in his understanding of the term, can never be felt or rightly estimated "without love of human nature and reverence for God." Thus it is that in Wordsworth's world —

[1] In some editions of *The Excursion* these lines read, —

Where knowledge, ill begun in cold remark
On outward things, with formal inference ends.

Book iv, ll. 622–623.

The primal duties shine aloft — like stars;
The charities that soothe, and heal, and bless,
Are scattered at the feet of Man — like flowers.

The puzzle of genius which presents itself in Burns, as we contrast his clearness of spiritual vision with his defective manhood, recurs in Coleridge. It has been said — by Matthew Arnold, and with characteristic incisiveness and flippancy — that Coleridge had no morals; and there is just truth enough in the gibe to give it place in the world's none too charitable memory; yet few makers of literature placed the nineteenth century under so deep a debt; and none, perhaps, wrought with more singleness of purpose — Matthew Arnold himself being witness — to discover and to expound the truth which lay at the heart of the problems of his day.[1] Something of this incoherence of life was suggested in his appearance and bearing. The splendid forehead and fine eyes, the eloquent and somewhat sensual mouth, together with a nose too small, as Hazlitt quaintly observed, to be the rudder to such a face, all serve to introduce us to a man of singular strength and feebleness. This contrast extended to personal manners and to habits of thought. The hands were carefully tended and scrupulously clean, but coat and waistcoat snuff-bestrewn. The walk to and fro while he talked was so vigourous and incessant as to give Hood the impression that he must be qualifying himself for an

[1] Arnold, *Essays in Criticism*, "Joubert."

itinerant preacher — and yet there was a slight shuffle in it. The talk itself was the marvel of his generation, as it has been of the generations since; yet when most inspiring it was rarely altogether comprehensible, and even when least comprehensible it did not fail to be inspiring. That it was prodigious in volume and scope admits of no doubt whatever. "What do you think of Dr. Channing, Mr. Coleridge?" asked a young neighbour at the tea-table. "Before entering upon that question, sir," replied Coleridge, with the air of a man beginning an evening's discourse, "I must put you in possession of my views, *in extenso*, on the origin, progress, present condition, future likelihoods, and absolute essence of the Unitarian controversy, and especially the conclusions I have — upon the whole — come to, on the great question of what may be termed the philosophy of religious difference."

There is scarce any tribute to his genius more unanswerable than the fact that such a man should be remembered otherwise than as the most portentous of bores. He was, as might have been expected, but an indifferent husband and father; yet clear-eyed, patient, altogether admirable Southey, upon whose heavy-laden shoulders the care of his family rested for many years, did not cease to love him — although to be sure, he used his well-earned privilege of occasionally quarrelling with him. He must have been the most difficult of guests; but Words-

worth, who once had him as an inmate of his house for a year and six months, could write, —

> O capacious Soul!
> Placed on this earth to love and understand;

and he remained with the Gilmans of Highgate for eighteen years.[1]

This is the man who was recognized to be one of the great intellectual and spiritual forces of his century by witnesses as diverse as Sir Walter Scott, F. D. Maurice, and Algernon Charles Swinburne. As Principal Tulloch put it, —

"Our business is not so much to attempt any criticism of the value of Coleridge's thought as to describe it as a new power. That it was such a power is beyond all question. It is not merely the testimony of such men as Archdeacon Hare and John Sterling, of Newman and of John Stuart Mill, but it is the fact that the later streams of religious thought in England are all more or less coloured by his influence. They flow in deeper and different channels since he lived. Not only are some of these streams directly traceable to him, and said to derive all their vitality from his principles, but those which are most opposed to him have been moulded more or less by the impress of his religious genius. There was much in the man Coleridge himself to provoke animadversion; there may have been aspects of his teaching that lend themselves to ridicule; but if a genius seminal as

[1] I shall be reminded that the date of Wordsworth's tribute is prior to that of Coleridge's visitation; but none the less, in 1805 Wordsworth knew his man.

his has been in the world of thought and of criticism as well as poetry, is not to excite our reverence, there is little that remains for us to reverence in the intellectual world. And when literature regains the higher tone of our earlier national life, the tone of Hooker and of Milton, Samuel Taylor Coleridge will be again acknowledged, in Julius Hare's words, as 'a true sovereign of English thought.' He will take rank in the same line of spiritual genius. He has the same elevation of feeling, the same profound grasp of moral and spiritual ideas, the same wide range of vision. He has, in short, the same love of wisdom, the same insight, the same largeness — never despising nature, or art, or literature for the sake of religion, still less ever despising religion for the sake of culture." [1]

All this is true; and when we attempt to measure Coleridge's influence in the field of poetry, as well as in that of religion and philosophy, the wonder grows. In the Introduction to the "Lay of the Last Minstrel" Scott makes the "acknowledgment due from the pupil to his master"; while to men like Rossetti, Coventry Patmore, and Swinburne, his lyric gift has been a genuine brook in the way — the inspiration and refreshment of their song. "The living Coleridge," says Mr. Dykes Campbell, "was ever his own apology, — men and women who neither shared nor ignored his shortcomings, not only loved him, but honoured and followed him."

[1] Tulloch, *Movements of Religious Thought in Britain*, pp. 7–8.

Coleridge still lives not merely in his poetry but in works in criticism, philosophy, and religion. We do not often take the "Aids to Reflection" or "The Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit" from their shelves and sit down with them to-day, — it were better perhaps for our faith and conduct if we did, — but, however thick the dust may lie upon the books themselves, their doctrine is as valid as ever, and we are unconsciously absorbing the best of it through other channels.

What is this doctrine? In a word I am tempted to call it the doctrine of God as a living spiritual Presence in the world, and of a "genial mind" in man. I use that phrase because it is Coleridge's own. He bespeaks a "genial mind" for every reader or would-be critic of the Bible, and means thereby that Scripture will never reveal itself except to the man who approaches it vitally and generously. As a record of human experience it is not susceptible of merely mechanical treatment. Like men of a true sort, it welcomes candour but deserves sympathy. So the divine element in life is latent and hidden except to the man of an "understanding heart." However ill Coleridge exemplified some of his own doctrines, faith and practice were correspondent in this matter of a genial mind. It was he, for instance, who saw the significance of German learning for English thought, and who, better still, interpreted it constructively. The great difficulty with many of the results of Continental speculation

in philosophy and theology as they have found their way to England and America is that they have been imported bodily, and upon arrival have been gorged so greedily — their value seeming to have been artificially enhanced by their crossing of the sea — as to preclude the possibility of digestion. Now there is, or at least there was, enough difference between the English and the German habit to make such a process fruitful of almost as much ill as good. For years Englishmen and Americans were slow to understand the real significance of German work. Especially when dealing with the most sacred themes the German attitude and method of approach filled them with a doubt which tended toward panic. This is to be seen very notably in the work of such a forerunner of the Oxford Movement as Hugh James Rose, and to a certain extent in the far better instructed Dr. Pusey.

From all such petty doubt Coleridge was delivered and wrought nobly to free his countrymen. His imagination and sympathies were singularly catholic. "It has been my habit, and, I may add, the impulse of my nature," he says in the "Biographia Literaria," "to assign the grounds of my belief, rather than the belief itself; and not to express dissent, till I could establish some points of complete sympathy, some grounds common to both sides, from which to commence its explanation."[1] Lacking the gifts of method or system, he was possessed

[1] *Biographia Literaria*, chap. iii.

in an extraordinary degree by a genius for insight. Hence what he has left us is a series of splendid fragments. They are of a seminal sort, however: they abide, take root, grow, and bear fruit after their kind.

He felt keenly the vital connection between ethics or religion and literature — which is but another way of saying that he recognized the relation of art to life. In a criticism of the poet Claudian, found among his note-books and published many years after his death, he makes this plain. "Every line, nay, every word, stops, looks full in your face, and asks and *begs* for praise! . . . I am pleased to think that when a mere stripling, I had formed the opinion that true taste was virtue, and that bad writing was bad feeling." [1]

This sound doctrine may serve to introduce a somewhat more specific inquiry as to just the elements of religious influence implicit if not expressed in his work. More than in the case of most great writers, Coleridge's poetry distinguishes itself from his prose. No English poet has given to his verse more of genuine witchery, the quality which at once delights, haunts, and amazes the reader, than he when at his best. Perhaps it might be added, that in no English poet of eminence is there a more puzzling gap between his best and his second best. "The Pains of Sleep" and "Dejection" show the possession of poetic gifts so high and rare that

[1] *Anima Poetæ* (1895), p. 165.

many critics are disposed to put them in the first class; and to the first class they might have belonged in the work of almost any other writer; but the suffrage of posterity tends more and more definitely to reserve that high distinction for "The Ancient Mariner," "Kubla Khan," and "Christabel." It is characteristic that two of these should be fragments. "The Ancient Mariner" probably comes as near to exemplifying in the concrete the mysterious gift which we call genius, as anything in English. It glorifies the humble ballad form; the story itself swims in a golden haze of witchery comparable to that which so often at once illuminates figures while it obscures detail in Turner's painting. And, besides all this, it has a distinct ethical quality so wondrously wrought into the very texture of the poem as never to obtrude itself yet never to suffer itself to be overlooked. Every young girl's commonplace book or autograph album contains, "He prayeth best who loveth best"; yet what reader of the "Ancient Mariner" ever felt the stanza to be other than an integral part of a perfect whole?

It is perhaps even more important to note the service which Coleridge renders to life as well as letters by the reintroduction of the atmosphere of wonder and mystery into English verse.[1] As was suggested in the Introduction, the capacity to wonder is essential to complete mental and spiritual

[1] Cf. J. C. Shairp, *Aspects of Poetry*.

development. It is as needful to science as it ever can be to religion. Without the sense of mystery, science is in danger of becoming dry and conceited, — a pseudo-science, which —

> simply remarking outward things,
> With formal inference ends, —

ethics degenerates into academic exercise; while faith buries itself in the whited sepulchre of Pharisaism.

In Coleridge's prose this element of the fanciful and mysterious does not appear. The play of fancy gives place to the exercise of a very richly endowed imagination. It is doubtful if any man ever wrote upon exalted philosophical and critical questions who was so easy to follow and comprehend. There is a superabundance of classical phrases, — a proverb seems without honour or application except it be in Latin, — but the English reader need never be in doubt concerning the general trend of the argument; while the wealth of cogent illustration, and the frequent occurrence of memorable sentences, keep weariness at bay. There is a tradition that Wordsworth and Samuel Rogers once sat three hours with Coleridge, who talked uninterruptedly about poetry during their entire stay; and that, upon leaving, each confessed to the other that he could make neither head nor tail of the discourse. It is credible; but our knowledge of Coleridge's written prose — even of so abstruse an essay as the partial "Hints towards the Formation of a More

Comprehensive Theory of Life," forbids us to believe that the morning could have been barren of either pleasure or profit; for to a singular degree in his published communings upon the highest themes, Coleridge is at once suggestive and memorable. He himself said that Wordsworth was distinguished for the "union of deep feeling with profound thought; the fine balance of truth in observing with the imaginative faculty in modifying the objects observed; and above all the original gift of spreading the tone, the atmosphere, and with it the depth and height of the ideal world around forms, incidents, and situations of which, for the common view, custom had bedimmed all the lustre, had dried up the sparkle and the dewdrops." [1]

The words can fairly be applied to his own "Aids to Reflection" and "Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit." The latter may serve as an example of a service rendered by Coleridge to his own generation, and in no sense outgrown by ours. The Christian thought of his day was in bondage to a dogma of Inspiration whose lustre had indeed grown dim. It plagued the thoughtful and conscientious, hampered Biblical research, and provoked the scorn of the graceless. The inerrancy of Scripture had become a superstition. No question of ordinary literary interest could be raised concerning the style or content of the Bible, without

[1] *Biographia Literaria*, chap. iv.

danger of incurring the charge of blasphemy. To these conditions Coleridge applied two principles of criticism. One was, that in all superstition there is a heart of unbelief; the other, that the figure of dictation to an amanuensis was, and must ever be, hopelessly inadequate to represent the inspiration of a good man or a sacred literature. "Why should I not believe the Scriptures throughout dictated, in word and thought, by an infallible Intelligence? . . . For every reason that makes me prize and revere these Scriptures. . . . Because the Doctrine in question petrifies at once the whole body of Holy Writ with all its harmonious and symmetrical gradations. . . . This breathing organism . . . the Doctrine in question turns at once into a colossal Memnon's head, a hollow passage for a voice."

That phrase, "this breathing organism," is highly significant for the understanding of Coleridge's philosophy and criticism. He had a keen sense and a high respect for the organic. The attempt to account for life or literature upon a mechanical basis was in his eyes not only to fail in criticism, but to commit sacrilege. His lectures upon Shakespeare and Milton are vitalized by this sense of organic form. There is a something in the whole which cannot be obtained by the mere addition of the parts. So he discovered the Bible to be a spiritual world in which each man found his own individual experience prefigured. Psalm XXIII means one thing if we conceive it to be the product of a

divine mandate issued to a human automaton with no choice but to record it. It bears a different and very much richer message to him who sees it wrought out of the stress and struggle of a fallible but believing human soul, — a man who, threatened by peril in the wilderness, has found, under divine guidance, green pastures and waters of comfort; whose enemies have not been able to rob him of the sources of sustenance which God has made sure and imperishable; and who has learned to contemplate with calmness even the dark adventure of death, assured that for this also God will enable him. Coleridge recognized with characteristic candour that this more reasonable doctrine of inspiration as a presence of the Spirit in human life, sanctifying all experience, and making it the natural means of revelation, might work temporary embarrassment and loss of authority to theologians of the dogmatic school. But none the less his hope stood sure in the validity of his doctrine and its application to the need of man. Some might wrest it to their own hurt, picking and choosing wilfully such Scripture as comported with their taste rather than that which met their need; but this is ever man's privilege in every department of life. Others might raise embarrassing questions — at least they seemed embarrassing in the second and third decades of last century — concerning the degree and quality of inspiration to be assigned to great and worthy extra-Biblical writings. Still he had his

answer ready. Among these other worthies the Bible would maintain its place like the sheaf which stood upright and received the obeisance of the other sheaves. What need to make hard and fast, or petty and peddling, distinctions? Were they not sheaves of the same harvest; the sheaves of brethren; and was not the bread of life in all?[1]

This is not to maintain that Coleridge's position was precisely that of the best instructed scholars of to-day; but it had this distinction, which put his own and later decades in debt to him, that, while it maintained a doctrine of inspiration which accorded with the nature of man as made in God's image, and with man's experience of God as a Spirit, — the Lord and Giver of Life, to Whom all avenues of nature are open, — it yet interpreted this new view constructively and vitally, so that he who accepted it felt himself to be twice the believer that he was before.

It was Coleridge's conviction that "in energetic minds truth soon changes by domestication into power."[2] He had entire confidence that the new views of great things to which his eyes were open would accord with all that was highest and best in man's past experience; and that whatever temporary confusion they might import into received opinions, their ultimate result must be the supply of a more abundant charter for faith than ever. He

[1] *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, letter vi.
[2] *Biographia Literaria*, chap. iv.

has placed the world in his debt by the consistency with which, throughout a somewhat inconsequent and fragmentary career, he clung to two or three principles of life and criticism. He believed that God was in His world in so intimate and real a sense that fearless investigation in any direction must ultimately serve to strengthen religious faith. He believed in the validity of man's religious experience, and that the highest literature was that which went deepest into the realm of the spiritual; but that, in criticism as in life, it is needful to remember that man is an organism not to be accounted for upon merely mechanical principles, not to be understood except by the "genial mind." To him the doubts and fears of men were scarcely less significant than their hopes and aspirations. Thus these two poets, Wordsworth with his sense of the significance of the goodly frame of earth and the plain people in it, and Coleridge with his eldritch fancy, his insatiable curiosity concerning the nature and origin of experience, and his consummate mastery of the art of expression, since both were men of faith, belong among —

> the happy few
> Who dwell on earth, yet breathe empyreal air,
> Sons of the morning.

CHAPTER IV

THE APOSTLES OF REVOLT: BYRON AND SHELLEY

When the natural history of revolutions comes to be written it will probably appear that Mirabeau, Danton, and Napoleon represent something more than individuals who played a great part in the most notable of political and social upheavals. They stand for types. Mirabeau represents the better element of the Past, suddenly come to itself, conscious of its danger, in some degree perhaps conscious of its shortcomings and guilt, and resolute to atone for them by a recognition of the new order of things; but anxious to guide the forces of change along immediately constructive channels — to save the fabric of the state from wreck. There is a story, very possibly apocryphal, that Mirabeau once mounted the Assembly's tribune, and, impelled by a sense of his own inadequacy to the demands of the moment, owing to the general lack of confidence in his character, cried out, "Oh that I had a different past!" He was thinking of his own misspent youth; but he spoke for France and that element in her life which he represented.

Danton, on the other hand, stands for the revolu-

tionary impulse, pure and simple, upon its destructive side. His are the fire, the sword, the ploughshare, all those implements whose office is to consume, to destroy, to overturn, to leave nothing as it has been. The antithesis of Lord Strafford in manner and purpose, 'thorough' is no less his motto.

To the work of these there succeeds the career of the soldier and builder, himself in some respects a mightier clearer-away of rubbish than either of his predecessors, but primarily a man of ambitions and plans whose fulfilment is made possible no less by the new day of which they have been heralds, than by his own genius. He is sure to be a great and striking figure in history, and to leave an ineffaceable stamp upon institutions. His influence is so portentous moreover, good and ill are so strangely and inextricably mingled in it, that his character remains long, perhaps permanently, in debate. He is not to be accounted for by ordinary rules; but he exercises a compelling fascination upon the minds of men, and goes far toward forming the ideals of multitudes.

It is scarcely too much to say that Lord Byron united in himself something that was most characteristic of these three graces or furies of Revolution. With the aristocratic connections and predilections of a Mirabeau, he possessed that lion-like man's native force of mind and body, and, still like him, wasted much of it in debauchery, though

retaining always, as his letters show, a generous modicum of strong common sense. At war with society and its recognized conventions, he, as one of his latest biographers has observed, adopted Danton's motto, "L'audace, l'audace, toujours l'audace,"[1] and was pretty consistent in his application of it to life; while his admiration of Napoleon was almost an obsession, as the great coach built upon the lines of Napoleon's travelling carriage, and with similar arrangements for eating and sleeping *en route*, long bore witness.

But it is when we come to account for his place and influence that the Napoleonic parallel most clearly asserts itself. It was Napoleon whom Goethe undoubtedly had in mind when, in his Autobiography, he confessed his faith in "dæmonic influence." He had noticed the phenomenon in looking about for a satisfying religious system. "It was not divine, for it seemed unintellectual; nor human, for it was no result of understanding; nor diabolic, for it was of beneficent tendency; nor angelic, for you could often notice in it a certain mischievousness. . . . Everything which fetters human agency seemed to yield before it; it seemed to dispose arbitrarily of the necessary elements of our existence." It is but rarely that those who exert this influence recommend themselves by goodness of heart; "but a gigantic force goes out of them, and they exercise an incredible power over

[1] John Nichol, *Byron*, chap. xi.

all creatures, nay, even over the elements themselves; and who can say how far this influence may reach? All *moral* forces are powerless against them. The masses are fascinated by them. They are only to be conquered by the universe itself." [1]

Lord Byron presents a cognate phenomenon in the world of literature. He was a sort of portent, a comet that for a while fixed men's gaze to the exclusion of the faithful and beneficent stars, but whose orbit and real significance are not easily calculated. He did his work at a time when the principles of literary revolution had been pretty well established by Cowper, Crabbe, and Burns. The best work of Wordsworth and Coleridge had been done and was struggling for the recognition which it deserved and was finally to obtain. A new hunger for romance was awakening in Britain. Chatterton had been its herald. The crude inventions of Mrs. Radcliffe and Horace Walpole had fed it, — but upon husks. Scott and Southey provided meat far more convenient for it; until in Byron's day it had reached, not a critical maturity, but an adolescence capable of great enthusiasms and insane extravagances. Byron's extraordinary career is not to be understood, probably it was not possible, apart from this public, excited by the political and social overturnings of the last two decades, stirred to its

[1] Cf. the reference to this passage by the late R. H. Hutton: "Goethe and his Influence," *Literary Essays*, pp. 1–2.

depths by the portent of Napoleon, alternately amused and angered by the new literary impulse which was voicing itself in the "Edinburgh," the "Quarterly," and "Blackwood's," and ready, as perhaps a British public never was ready, before or since, for a new and mad enthusiasm. Upon such a morning as this Byron could wake and find himself famous; and in a day fittingly introduced by such a morning, he was able to eclipse men so superior in every attribute of manhood as Sir Walter Scott, and poets like Coleridge and Wordsworth.

It is with a sort of half-nauseated amusement that the reader of to-day toils through the mass of Byronic literature. He dutifully notes the slightly deformed foot, the teeth of exquisite brilliance and regularity, the hands gloved indoors as well as out to keep them white, and the temples, shaved, as Byron said, to preserve the vigour of the hair — although incidentally of course the process heightened a 'marble brow'; and wonders whether outside a library of three-volume novels so much space were ever before given to sentimental nonsense. Sir Walter Scott was lame, and bore his infirmity like a Christian and a gentleman. Coleridge — it surprises us a little — kept his hands with scrupulous neatness. Wordsworth dressed like a peasant, and sometimes drove abroad in a dung-cart, with a plain deal board laid across the sides for a seat. Cowper wore a night-cap which has, alas, been perpetuated by Romney. Crabbe, in his old age, grew

beautifully grey, so that a little child in his parish said quite simply when told of his death, "We shall never see his good white head going up into the pulpit any more." These matters are incidents in notable careers which possess a certain interest if we stumble upon them casually, but are in no way essential to our understanding of the career itself. In Byron's case they are of the essence of his make-up.

I am resolute to exclude the judgement of Mr. Saintsbury here because of his well-known anti-Byronic views; but none the less, in reminding us that the light of Byron's muse, so far from being that which never was on land or sea, is the light which shines nightly on the front of the stage, he speaks words of truth and soberness. Byron was the great literary *poseur* of the century. No estimate of his character or his work can be adequate which leaves his consuming vanity out of account; nor does the memory recall any mind of a high order of ability the ideals of whose vanity were so perverse. Egotism could scarce go further in the direction of that perversity which is close allied to madness, than in the attempt, made again and again in his writings and conversation, to represent himself as the hero of all sorts of dubious adventures; unless it were in an endeavour to appear the victim of melancholy induced by remorse. This "pageant of his bleeding heart" was wonderfully effective. It brought multitudes of readers and ad-

mirers; but it came perilously near to justifying Mr. Mallock's recipe for writing "a Satanic poem like the late Lord Byron."

"Take a couple of fine deadly sins and let them hang before your eyes until they become racy. Then take them down, dissect them, and stew them for some time in a solution of weak remorse; after which they may be devilled with mock despair."

It is impertinent, of course, but then, so was Lord Byron, and most free from taint or suspicion of hypocrisy when he was impertinent, as in his early "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers,"—though even here one is forced to add a postscript to the effect that this satire was almost certainly composed with a view merely to the English Bards, and only launched at the Scotch Reviewers after the famous criticism in the "Edinburgh" had opened the way for a little more extended and telling insolence than the poet had originally contemplated.

It will readily be imagined that any one who looks for a unifying principle, philosophic, religious, or political, in the mass of Byron's verse will look in vain. The centre of all is Himself. With Protean facility he appears and reappears as Childe Harold, as Manfred, as Don Juan. This is not for a moment to question his possession of extraordinary poetic gifts; it is not to impugn the courage which he undoubtedly possessed, or the generosity of which he was occasionally capable, or the sincerity of his attachment to the cause of liberty, or the enormous

obstacles which heredity, early training, and later environment opposed to the development of any consistent and satisfying manhood. The broken sentence, which he interrupted when he found himself likely to be betrayed into sincere and earnest expression, was characteristic of his conversation; and it was necessary that his general attitude toward men and things fitted to dwarf the central figure of himself should have been one of denial or scorn. Hence his cynicism not only becomes him, but is essential to him. There is no need to formulate its gospel into the code of perversity which Macaulay attributed to him, "Thou shalt hate thy neighbour, and thou shalt love thy neighbour's wife." Byron was not the man to own allegiance to anything, not even to a person of his own choosing or a creed of his own making. He was no unbeliever, as Shelley thought himself to be. Indeed, if the testimony of his valet Fletcher is to be received at anything like face value, he maintained a pretty consistent claim to faith in the fundamentals of Christianity. Had he been a frank and devoted apostle of revolution, as Shelley was, he might conceivably have placed us under a genuine debt: the note of scorn may help when it ministers to something higher; though unruly and treacherous, it sometimes proves a useful servant; but as a master its tyranny is hopeless and fruitless, and Byron was more completely its slave than Swift had ever been. There is a trace of tonic quality in the *sæva indignatio* of the latter. The

mockery of the former would, if no corrective were supplied, poison the very fountains of moral and spiritual health.

On the other hand we may admit Byron's genuine love for this goodly frame of earth. His pessimism does not extend, like Thomson's,[1] to sea or sky. It is the latter who sings, —

> For I am infinitely tired
> With this old sphere we once admired,
> With this old earth we loved too well,
> And would not mind a change of Hell.

Byron felt the freedom of the open sea and responded to the strange influence — half uplift, half oppression — of the mountains. Most of all, perhaps, he took joy of the meeting of sea and land upon the picturesque Italian coast, where it was his custom after bathing to climb to some point of observation and sit for hours in thought. There is no affectation in his feeling for nature, although there is sometimes a trace of bombast in his versification of it, even the famous —

> Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean, roll!

containing just a suggestion of Ossian. But when men begin to move and dream and suffer on the sea or in the hills, then at once the motive of sincerity grows mixed. Manfred in the Alps is hopelessly melodramatic : —

[1] The reference is, of course, to "B. V." of *The City of Dreadful Night ;* not to him of *The Seasons.*

"The mists boil up around the glaciers; clouds
Rise curling fast beneath me, white and sulphury,
Like foam from the roused ocean of deep Hell,
Whose every wave beats on a living shore,
Heap'd with the damn'd like pebbles. — I am giddy."

The reader does not wonder that the chamois-hunter who appears in time to prevent Manfred's own plunge into this ocean cries, —

"This is convulsion and no healthful life."

It is the ultimate criticism to be passed, not only upon this particular play, but upon the Byronic idea of tragedy. The element of misanthropy was inevitable to Byron, in view of his character and the manner of his passionate and chaotic life; but he only serves to illustrate again what every true student of life and literature must have observed, that tragedy of a genuine sort is beyond the reach of a misanthrope. The deeper and graver contradictions of circumstance require correspondently deep and grave sympathies for their interpretation. Here Byron fails, falling upon mere sound and fury to perform an office in which the heart must be honestly enlisted if it is ever to be adequately done. So, on the other hand, when the poet launches out into the deep, I, for one, prefer the rather commonplace descriptive poem of "The Island," built as it is upon the framework of the famous Bounty mutiny, to the much lauded shipwreck in "Don Juan." There is no doubt whatever that the second canto of "Don Juan" shows that Byron possessed an

11625

extraordinary facility in the translation of prose into verse — some of it extremely bad verse. The whole shipwreck scene bears testimony which cannot be gainsaid to his acquaintance with the sea, to his knowledge of its dangers and its ways, to his laborious study of narratives of storm and wreck, to an almost unrivalled rhetorical gift, and to as complete an absence of good taste and a true sense of tragedy.

Sir Walter Scott, in one of those Philistine outbursts which testify so conclusively to his frank and genuine humanity, remarked that Lord Byron handled his pen with the careless ease of a man of quality; and no doubt Byron liked to spread the impression abroad that he never drudged at verse-making. It was his boast that "Lara" was composed while undressing on his return from masques and balls, while the "Bride" and the "Corsair" were written in four and ten days respectively. Be this as it may, a careful study of the shipwreck scene in "Don Juan" shows it to be a paraphrase of fragments taken bodily from stories of famous disasters and pieced together with amazing inventiveness and skill. It should be remembered that these were authentic accounts of heroic struggle in which men matched their puny strength against the mightiest forces of nature; of long-continued suffering often borne with sublime patience; and of genuinely tragic death. Yet Byron has deliberately set himself to the transformation of this material into a

96

conglomerate, not merely of tragedy and comedy, — which might conceivably be true to life, — but of sentimentality varied with burlesque. It is very likely done as well as it could be done saving the crudity of some stanzas; but it was none the less a barbarous thing to do at all, a thing impossible to a man of fine and high feeling. Literature will, I hope, always have a place for "Bab Ballads" and the like. It is no grudging immortality which one concedes to —

> "Oh, I am a cook, and a captain bold,
> And the mate o' the Nancy, brig."

The process whereby the singer attained to his strange eminence, involving as it did the cooking and eating of his companions, is told with a particularity at once so grewsome and delicious as to give it high place in farce. But suppose Mr. Gilbert had gone through the Admiralty archives and searched the records of Lloyd's in order to burlesque some of the moving incidents of shipwreck, while to others he accorded the meed of rather sentimental homage; suppose, to be specific, that he had retold the loss of the Birkenhead in the manner of Sir Francis Doyle, but had introduced some jocose quip, or played some clever metric prank, at the end of each alternate stanza. To suppose such a thing involves the necessity of apologizing to Mr. Gilbert's memory; yet it is a fair parallel to Lord Byron's performance in this famous canto.

Mr. Swinburne, in his memorable and character-

istically extravagant essay upon Wordsworth and Byron, has specified imagination and harmony as two indispensable elements in genuine poetry. Both of these are notably lacking in most of Byron's work. Inventiveness and ingenuity he has in high degree; he is passed-master in that art of quick transition, which gives the form and often the soul of smartness — if smartness have a soul — to verse. But that imagination which sees into the heart of men and things, which puts one's self in another's place, and perceives particulars in their universal aspect, he assuredly lacked; and with it the sense of harmony, whether as applied to the mere music of verse, or given that wider application which enables the music of verse to echo the deeper harmonies of life. He could be melodious enough at times, and some of his lyrics will be long remembered.[1]

I have expressed this general opinion of Byron with a little hesitation because of a fear lest my theme should seem to have inoculated me with anti-Byronic prejudice. So far from being conscious of such prejudice, I felt, as not long ago I undertook to renew and extend acquaintance with him after

[1] So, the reader will remind me, will the tributes of Continental critics, especially Goethe, Mazzini, and Castelar. It is unquestionably a notable thing that these representatives of three great Continental literatures should have been so ready to pay tribute to Byron. They are eminent names and their dicta are not to be set aside lightly; but what is needful to be said in answer has been said with so great aptness, fairness, and conclusiveness by Mr. Swinburne (*Nineteenth Century*, vol. xv) as to relieve all later critics of responsibility and opportunity alike.

many years of relative neglect, a distinct expectation of interest and uplift. There was no especial anticipation of agreement; but I was entirely ready to appreciate, — to admire strength and vital force in themselves even where I could not approve the manner or the object of their expenditure. The first long poem to be read continuously was "Cain," and from it I passed on, by way of the "Hebrew Melodies" and other miscellanies, to "Childe Harold," "Don Juan," "The Island," and "Manfred." But alas for my expected impulse either pro or con! For about this same time I was reading Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound," and discovered that beside him Byron's Lucifer grew stale and unprofitable indeed. Since that experience, I have chanced upon a remark by Mr. Saintsbury which is exactly descriptive of it. "The really great poets do not injure each other in the very least by comparison, different as they are. Milton does not 'kill' Wordsworth; Spenser does not injure Shelley; there is no danger in reading Keats immediately after Coleridge. But read Byron in close juxtaposition with any of these, or with not a few others, and the effect, to any good poetic taste, must surely be disastrous."

Where lies the secret of this? In the fact, I think, that there is no room in the circle of the greatest poets for the mocker, no place in the greatest poetry for the sneer. Yet the sneer and mocking question may be said to comprise Byron's

whole arsenal of negative weapons in "Cain." There are some powerful lines — though none too many of them; there are one or two powerfully painted scenes; there is a certain beauty and pathos in the pleading of Cain's wife; but intellectually Cain is almost as feeble as the late Robert Elsmere; while Lucifer himself exhibits few characteristics which either promise or threaten to give him permanent hold upon the minds of men. A most sympathetic critic has remarked that "bare rebellion cannot endure, and no succession of generations can continue nourishing themselves on the poetry of complaint, and the idealization of revolt."[1]

It would be difficult to characterize better Byron's service to his age and his failure to attain the place for which the possession of his unquestionably great powers seemed to destine him. I have called him an apostle of revolution. "Complaint, and the idealization of revolt" gave to his whole life and work an almost tragically disjointed and negative aspect. He loved freedom — yet it was a freedom not merely from tyranny, but from all restraint, whether exercised by society or himself. Let us be generous here. It is hard to realize to-day how much, in the reaction following upon the Napoleonic wars, there was to revolt against, in social and domestic life, in politics and religion. The age deserved its Byron, and conceivably his ill-ordered life and incoherent message may have been better

[1] John Morley, *Critical Miscellanies*, First Series, p. 254.

fitted to the needful work than a finer and more artistic instrument. So, too, in reply to Matthew Arnold's friendly criticism of a lack of matter, and Mr. Morley's eminently fair though searching remark that Byron was weak upon the reflective side and lacked intellectual means of satisfying himself in respect of his visions and aspirations,[1] Carlyle's outburst upon the poet's death may always be cited, "Byron — good generous hapless Byron! And yet when he died he was only a *Kraftmann* (*powerman*, as the Germans call them). Had he lived he would have been a poet." He seems indeed like a youth of extraordinary gifts and equally extraordinary vanity whose development has halted in his sophomore year — the age of sporadic generosity and epidemic perversity.

No man can illustrate better the need which Literature has of some comprehensive and coördinating principle upon which to feed her soul. In letters as in life the word of the Apostle stands, "By faith are ye saved." Without it tragedy sickens into melodrama, and comedy degenerates into wearisome burlesque. There is no room to doubt the tragic element in life; its rudiments appear in every contradiction offered to human hope and aspiration. As little can one question the element of comedy, implicit as it is in the multitude of life's queer incongruities. The great poet sees both elements and fuses them in the alembic of his mind. This natural

[1] *Critical Miscellanies*, First Series, p. 275.

mingling of tears and laughter is possible to him according as he has faith in man as God's son reflecting the universe *in petto;* equal, because of his divine origin and destiny, to the ultimate mastery of fate, and therefore able to beguile the way with honest mirth at the play of circumstance.

In passing from Byron to Shelley, I am reminded of a criticism by Coleridge upon the characters of Caliban and Ariel.

"The character of Caliban is wonderfully conceived: he is a sort of creature of the earth, as Ariel is a sort of creature of the air. . . . Still, Caliban is in some respects a noble being: the poet has raised him far above contempt, — he is a man in the sense of the imagination: all the images he uses are drawn from Nature, and are highly poetical; they fit in with the images of Ariel. Caliban gives us images from the earth, Ariel images from the air. . . . No mean figure is employed (by Caliban), no mean passion displayed, beyond animal passion and repugnance to command." [1]

I would not have my readers think that I propose a comparison between Lord Byron and Caliban, — a comparison which would be no less impertinent than artificial, and which, if Byron were still capable of wrath, must needs rouse him to an anger beside which the fabled ire of Juno would seem tame. And yet — and yet, the words of Coleridge haunt us. When we set Byron and Shelley

[1] *Lectures upon Shakespeare and Milton*, Lecture IX.

side by side, this Caliban-Ariel picture will recur. One seems "a sort of creature of the earth" as the other is "a sort of creature of the air." This creature of the earth is moreover "in some respects a noble being; the images he uses are drawn from Nature and are highly poetical." Few mean figures are employed, few mean passions displayed "beyond animal passion and repugnance to command." The secret of Byron's perversity is to be sought in the strength of his passions, and in an idea of freedom which would defy all constituted authority, whether of a king above him or a society about him, in the interests of an untrammelled individualism. It is here that the reader has an abundant right to ask, "Did not Shelley show an equal perversity? Was not his first publication which attracted notice a pamphlet upon the 'Necessity of Atheism,' and is not the very 'Prometheus Unbound,' which has just been cited to the disadvantage of Byron, a poem of rebellion and negation?" To which I answer: No doubt Shelley thought himself to be an atheist; no doubt he was expelled from college for his supposedly atheistic pamphlet; no doubt the "Prometheus" is a poem of revolt. As little can it be denied that Shelley was a very iconoclast among the sacred social conventions of his time, smashing, along with much trash and lumber, some very precious vases filled with priceless ointment. He, too, often spoke and acted as though freedom consisted primarily in absence of control, whether by consti-

tuted authority above, society around, or self within. Yet none can read the man's life, note the impression which he has made upon high-minded men and women of his own and later times, and study his work, after making due allowance for the immaturity of "Queen Mab" and the early pamphlets, without a consciousness of the essential rightness of purpose which not only persisted but grew through the thirty turbulent years. It is a strange story, this of the poet's impetuous, contradictory, unsatisfying life. The three short decades were long enough for tragedy and comedy, purity and what society at least called lewdness, reverence and a most unholy boldness, to mingle in seemingly inextricable confusion. Every person is a mystery passing our power of definition. In Shelley's case the mystery is so deep that I for one would contemplate it with a wonder as little mingled as may be with curiosity.

A sympathetic critic has remarked that Shelley carried the Protestant spirit to its ultimate extreme. "He was, moreover, in haste; he could not rest in a doubt, he could not suspend his judgement, he could not wait for fuller knowledge." [1] This is well said. Whatever Shelley thought, he was impelled to say, without waiting to bring his theory to the test of the world's previous experience to see whether it possessed the notes of truth or not. Perceiving some of the limitations and in-

[1] G. E. Woodberry, *Makers of Literature*, p. 188.

felicities of the current orthodoxy, he must needs rush into callow print with an essay whose title absurdly overstated his real position. Although free, as it would seem, from taint of low sensuality, and impressing some who knew him well with a conviction of his essential purity, he yet held and practised views about marriage which were bound to be as subversive of decent society as they were fatal to his own individual peace. Let those who complain of the sordidness of the commonplace family relation re-read the story of Shelley's foolish marriage with Harriet Westbrook, his elopement with Mary Godwin, his absurd yet apparently honest suggestion that the two women live as friends and neighbours, the natural suffering and not unnatural suicide of Harriet, and the blight which the whole hopeless complication brought upon Shelley's later life, and say whether, after all, the elder fashion, wrought out of long centuries of human experience, whereby a man and woman are joined for better for worse until death part them, have not much to commend it even in a day of revolution. However 'sordid' the common lot of husband, wife, and children may be, it assumes a halo of grace as well as dignity when contrasted with these pitiable details of weariness, infelicity, unfaithfulness, controversy over the custody of children, and the sorry train of crimination and recrimination which has dragged itself over almost a century of English letters in the case of Shelley.

The poet's general integrity of life and honesty of speech are not to be gainsaid. His utterances in behalf of 'freedom' would carry greater weight, however, if they could be cleared of the suspicion that once at least the zeal of his preaching was heightened by a desire to practise.

The significance of his life does not require the justification of this miserable and essentially unjustifiable episode in it. One does not need to prove that Shelley was one of the best of men in order to substantiate his claim to a place in the chief choir of English singers, or in the company of those who have uplifted and inspired the moral nature of their fellows. Here, once more, is to be noted the catholicity of inspiration. Precisely as it is one of man's prerogatives to rise not merely in spite of, but by means of, the forces which oppose him, so the flame of the Spirit seems sometimes enhanced in brilliancy through its ability to conquer and feed upon the very things that might have been expected to quench it. "Art for art's sake" is so poor a member of the family of cant phrases that we wonder at its vitality. Yet, like most cant phrases, it contains an element of truth, in its recognition of the fact that God can often find place and use for agents which society must reject. Art is for life's sake; but the Spirit of Truth and Beauty, from whose inspiration all art proceeds, does not necessarily contemn an instrument because it seems little adapted to the purposes of life in general. Man has made as yet

such halting development that we rarely find a representative of the race big enough to bear the consciousness of unusual powers and gifts without being thrown into unstable social equilibrium by it. The man of genius is likely to be so intense an individualist as to be a very indifferent member of society. His service is not therefore to be judged by a special rule. He is simply to be treated with the same large charity which alone can make human relations tolerable in common life. To proclaim his absolution from the ordinary obligations of the family and community simply because of his singular endowment as a man, is as self-contradictory and absurd as to excuse a fountain for playing muddy water, on the ground of its singular distinction of design. It may be plausibly contended that the design of the fountain is a matter quite apart from the quality of the water, and that the fountain would be no less a work of beauty and delight though it played ink; which is half, and perhaps three quarters, true. None the less a base or perverted product is bound eventually to obscure the distinction of the misused means, either by debasing, disfiguring, or destroying them. Poets and artists are born to see truth and beauty and then to interpret them truly and beautifully. Squinting or astigmatic eyes have never been regarded as other than disadvantages to them. Strabismic moral vision is quite as little likely to enhance their power or the quality of their interpretation of Nature.

Nor can men be trusted to reflect the truth and beauty of life who themselves utterly fail to fulfil their own manhood. Their art is in grave danger of infection from their debility of character. This is not to claim for a moment that great natures are to be crammed into little moulds or judged by merely conventional standards. One of their chief services is to show men how petty and inadequate such moulds and standards are. But the question as to their fulfilment of some worthy manhood is a fair one, because it bears directly in the great majority of cases upon their ability to see and tell the truth, and scarcely less upon the trustworthiness and probably permanence of their ideas of beauty.

Hence the possession of the fundamental virtues of courage, reverence, simplicity and purity of heart are of moment to the poet. None will venture to question Shelley's moral and physical courage; while his simplicity — a childlike simplicity and freedom from affectation, which sometimes led him into strange and ludicrous adventures — is as little to be gainsaid. There is no lack of those who will deny outright, upon the other hand, his claim to any semblance of reverence, and who stand ready to cast grave doubts upon his cleanness of heart. They will cite his attitude toward Christianity and toward his father in support of their former claim, and buttress their position by reference to the notes to "Queen Mab." To substantiate the latter they will have recourse to Shelley's abandonment

of Harriet Westbrook, his elopement with Mary Godwin, his susceptibility to the influence of Emilia Viviani, who inspired the "Epipsychidion," and some passages in his poems, most notably, perhaps, the original scheme of "Laon and Cythna," which made the two brother and sister, and the sixth canto of the same poem as it was finally published under the title of "The Revolt of Islam." This evidence is not to be altogether rebutted; but on the other hand a clear and charitable view of all the circumstances of the poet's life goes far toward tempering and mitigating it. Shelley impressed competent judges, I repeat, as a man of singular purity of thought and life. He could not endure obscene or suggestive stories, and seems to have felt all a gentleman's natural aversion to the Irishman, Curran, because of the part which they played in his conversation. His verse, moreover, while eminently sensuous at times, is upon the whole singularly free from taint of sensuality. Shelley was no disembodied spirit, as he is sometimes represented to have been; but a man of vigourous (and awkward) physique, after the early threats of pulmonary trouble had been outlived. He loved bathing, boating, riding, pistol-shooting, though reckless and somewhat inefficient in them all. His target practice was a menace to his friends, his bathing put his life in frequent jeopardy, and his yachting finally ended it. Characteristically enough, he entered heartily into the spirit of these sports, but persisted in ig-

noring their physical conditions and requirements. Getting once beyond his depth in Arno, he lay perfectly quiet at the bottom of a pool, until fished out by Trelawny; and then, upon catching his breath, greeted his rescuer in this wise: —

"I always find the bottom of the well, and they say Truth lies there. In another minute I should have found it, and you would have found an empty shell. . . . Death is the veil, which those who live call life: they sleep and it is lifted."[1]

Such an incident suggests the impossibility of judging the man by ordinary standards; not because his extraordinary parts grant him immunity, but because the basis upon which ordinary judgement can rest is lacking as really, if not as completely, as in the case of an insane person. So it must be considered that, while Shelley was inexcusably guilty in deserting his first wife for Mary Godwin, there is some reason to suppose that evidence may yet be forthcoming which would have justified separation if not divorce; his theories concerning marriage — theories which none can doubt he held with perfect honesty — are to be taken into account, and it must be remembered further that, barring this lapse, Shelley impresses the reader of to-day, as he impressed his companions, as a man chaste in act, speech, and thought. He believed that the facts of experience must be faced, and that even the most shocking facts are legitimate material

[1] Trelawny's *Recollections of Shelley and Byron*, p. 40.

for literary treatment. Granting such justification for the subject of a tragedy like "The Cenci," it is hard to see how nameless outrage could be treated with higher reserve, or finer feeling for the decencies as well as for the genuine tragedies of life.

Shelley's claim to the possession of reverence is not less the subject of conflicting testimony. His treatment of his father was bad, though Sir Timothy is so grotesquely Philistine a figure, with his merely formal morality, his conventional religion, his confidence in the protection of the "exalted mind" of the Duke of Norfolk, and all the rest of it, as to foreordain that the two should never understand each other. There is a something half ludicrous, half pathetic, about his proposition to read "Palley's" (so he called the name) "Natural Theology" with his son, in hope of converting him from the views of "The Necessity of Atheism" and the notes to "Queen Mab." How far this influence could go in the direction of integrity of faith and life may be judged from the pretty well authenticated belief that at the same time he was assuring Shelley of his implacability toward any *mésalliance* on his part, but of his entire readiness to provide for the issue of any irregular connections he might form.[1] This does not excuse, though it may account for, the language of disrespect which at times the poet used toward his father. If any excuse is to be made it must rest upon Shelley's

[1] Cf. J. A. Symonds, *Shelley*, chap. i, p. 5.

later possession by at least a trace of the mania of distrust and fear of Sir Timothy which certainly oppressed one period of his boyhood. Be all this as it may, however, the secret of Shelley's reverence and irreverence is to be sought in the words of Orsino in "The Cenci":—

> "Words are but holy as the deeds they cover:
> A priest who has forsworn the God he serves;
> A judge who makes Truth weep at his decree;
> . . . . . .
> A father who is all a tyrant seems,
> Were the profaner for his sacred name." [1]

It is scarcely too much to say that Shelley's whole life with all his work must be brought to the test of this passage before it can be adequately understood. "The Anarch Custom" was his arch-enemy. Like a true disciple of revolution, he was little versed in history and had no taste for investigation into custom's growth. He could never realize the extent in which it represents the aspirations, struggles, and achievements of earlier generations, which, to be sure, have hardened into relative uselessness, like the bread too thickly encrusted in the baking, or the good soil of the footpath worn barren by many passing feet. Enough for him to feel that custom was tyrannous in the present; it need not be generally tyrannous; if only it should seem oppressive in specific cases, it must forthwith be arraigned, convicted, and most eloquently sentenced. This is

[1] *The Cenci*, act ii, scene 2.

the open secret of Shelley's negative influence, his so-called atheism, irreverence, and immorality.

Upon the other hand his positive doctrine, in the proclamation of which he is very bold and which will, perhaps in his own despite, give him a permanent place among leaders and inspirers of religious and social thought, may be suggested by a passage from the preface to "Alastor": —

"They who, deluded by no generous error, . . . duped by no illustrious superstition, loving nothing on this earth and cherishing no hopes beyond, yet keep aloof from sympathies with their kind, . . . these and such as they have their apportioned curse; . . . they are morally dead; they are neither friends, nor lovers, nor fathers, nor citizens of the world, nor benefactors of their country. . . . Those who love not their fellow-beings live unfruitful lives and prepare for their old age a miserable grave."

Shelley not only preached this doctrine but abundantly illustrated it in practice. The "regeneration of mankind" was not only the theme of "Laon" and "Prometheus," it was the subject of the poet's own contemplation day by day. He refused on principle the proposition of his father and grandfather to entail the family estates, — worth £20,000 a year at his grandfather's death, — although his consent would have brought him an immediate annual income of £2000, and his need was pressing. He was a persistent and sympathetic visitor among the poor, showing at times a far more practical in-

sight into the true conditions of distress than could have been expected. Even his descent upon Ireland when he was scarcely twenty, with his girl-wife, Harriet, and his sister-in-law, Eliza, who had their common stock of money hid in some nook or corner of her dress, — "we are not dependent upon her although she gives it out as we want it," he says with delicious simplicity, — and his "Address to the Irish People" are further removed from farce-comedy than appears at first glance. Among the physicians at whose hands Ireland has suffered so many things, none was ever freer from taint of quackery than this impulsive boy; nor have many been able to furnish a prescription better related to the fundamental needs of a distracted people; though, with its insistence upon the necessity of toleration, calmness, mildness, patience, and the formation of "habits of Sobriety, Regularity, and Thought," its form was so ill adapted to Irish taste as to leave little chance that it would ever be taken.[1] Through all his works and days Shelley seems to have been loyal to the resolution taken in his boyhood at Eton as he heard

> From the near school-room, voices, that alas!
> Were but one echo from a world of woes —
> The harsh and grating strife of tyrants and of foes.
> . . . . . .
> So without shame I spake: — "I will be wise,
> And just, and free, and mild, if in me lies
> Such power, for I grow weary to behold

[1] For a brief abstract of this Address see Symonds's *Shelley*, chap. iii.

The selfish and the strong still tyrannize
Without reproach or check." I then controlled
My tears, my heart grew calm, and I was meek and bold." [1]

It is only in the light of this intense feeling of hostility to tyranny, of sympathy with the hopes and fears of suffering man, and of faith in a universe created and animated by such a Spirit that this human struggle must finally avail, that we begin to realize Shelley's testimony to the place and power of religion. It voices itself in many forms. He had a keen sense for the mystery of things and that impulse to keep putting the deepest and most searching questions to life which is the essence of religion.

Why aught should fail and fade that once is shown;
Why fear and dream and death and birth
Cast on the daylight of this earth
Such gloom; why man has such a scope
For love and hate, despondency and hope! [2]

He had, too, and that in high degree, a sense of the largeness and seriousness of life. It is here that his 'atheism' shows itself to be far more deeply and sincerely religious than the half-believing cynicism of Byron. The very titles that the two poets chose accentuate the contrast. As Mr. Swinburne has said with characteristic assurance, but something less than his habitual exaggeration: —

"When Shelley threw himself upon poetry as his organ, his topics were not 'Hours of Idleness,' and

[1] *The Revolt of Islam*, Dedication, stanzas 3 and 4.
[2] *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*.

'Hints from Horace,' and 'The Waltz'; they were the redemption of the world by the martyrdom of righteousness, and the regeneration of mankind through 'Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom and Endurance'; they were the heroism of Beatrice and the ascension of Adonais, and they were the resurrection of Italy and of Greece, and they were the divinest things of nature, made more divine through the interpretation of love infallible and the mastery of insuperable song."[1]

Moreover, while Shelley, as became a true son of revolution, was deficient in the historic sense and had little appreciation of the slow but sure growth of the race "in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man," the story of which makes the Past sacred and every real history a book of revelation, he did have in a more or less dim way a sense of that ultimate wholeness and integrity of life which is the root idea in holiness. Just as in "Alastor" he sets forth the inappeasable hunger of his soul for the key and secret of life, so in the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" he communicates to us something of his confidence in the existence of a Spirit, which, living at the heart of things, has power to reconcile life's contradictions.

Love, hope, and self-esteem, like clouds depart
And come, for some uncertain moments lent.
Man were immortal and omnipotent,
Didst thou, unknown and awful as thou art,
Keep with thy glorious train firm state within his heart.

[1] "Wordsworth and Byron," *Nineteenth Century*, vol. xv, p. 609.

Along each of these convergent lines he was bringing his burden of testimony to the reality of religion as a prime concern of man. It remained in a lyrical drama of the greatest distinction to touch the heart of the Gospel.

The "Prometheus Unbound" is without question a poem of revolt; but it is as far as possible from being a poem of negation. On the contrary it sets forth, somewhat mystically and ideally of course, or it would not be Shelley's, the necessary and inevitable victory of the vital principle of Christianity. The Jove whose reign is threatened is a tyrant seated upon a throne of irresponsible and unreasonable power. Prometheus is the Titan whose heart has been touched by the sorrow and the need of man, and who would fain deliver him. For his rebellion against tyranny and his refusal even when vanquished to give in his allegiance to the despot, he is chained on Caucasus and tormented by the furies, who come —

> with hydra tresses,
> And iron wings that climb the wind.

Thus the poem deals with —

> Fate and Chance and God and Chaos old,
> And Love, and the chained Titan's woful doom,
> And how he shall be loosed, and make the earth
> One brotherhood.

Prometheus in his anguish curses Jove, but later, — and this is a touch impossible, I think, to any modern

poet except Shelley, — bethinking himself that such tyranny is by its very nature doomed, recants his curse and finds something very like pity filling the void in his heart that hate has made. The furies taunt him with the infernal gospel that —

> Those who do endure
> Deep wrongs for man, and scorn, and chains, but heap
> Thousand-fold torment on themselves and him.

They mock him further with their picture of the confusion and hopelessness of the world's affairs: —

> The good want power, but to weep barren tears.
> The powerful goodness want: worse need for them.
> The wise want love; and those who love want wisdom;
> And all best things are thus confused to ill.

Through it all Prometheus endures with heavenly patience, saying, —

> "And yet I feel
> Most vain all hope but love. . . .
> . . . I would fain
> Be what it is my destiny to be,
> The saviour and the strength of suffering man."

I may not stop to sketch in Shelley's words, as I should like to do, the coming of Demogorgon, "a tremendous gloom," before whom the tyrant sitting upon his seat of injustice trembles and falls. Jupiter has been rejoicing in sheer power.

> "All else has been subdued to me; alone
> The soul of man, like unextinguished fire,
> Yet burns toward heaven with fierce reproach, and doubt,
> And lamentation, and reluctant prayer,
> Hurling up insurrection, which might make

Our antique empire insecure, though built
On eldest faith, and hell's coeval, fear."

Finally, before the power of love working by faith, of love incarnate in a great nature making willing sacrifice of self for man, of love joined to Eternity,[1] that tyranny is overthrown, fear has its sting plucked away,—

And Conquest is dragged captive through the deep.

But I hope to have sketched the great poem in sufficient outline to indicate how far it is from being a work of mere negation and how immediately related it is to Christianity. A poem of revolt it may indeed be called; but it is revolt against the tyranny of mechanical mythologies and ecclesiasticisms; against theories of atonement, if one pleases, which would represent Christ as coming to deliver man from a fierce and savage God.

Precisely as the other poems depict the hunger of the mind after some source of efficient and beneficent control in the world's affairs,—a hunger which Beatrice voices when she expresses her despair:—

"If there should be
No God, no Heaven, no Earth in the void world;
The wide, grey, lampless, deep, unpeopled world!"

so the "Prometheus" sets forth the appeal which the sacrifice of Christ made to Shelley's heart,

[1] I believe that this interpretation of the stupendous figure of Demogorgon comports best with the general scheme of the drama.

however unwilling he may have been to express it in terms of conventional piety. How compelling this appeal was in some of its aspects is witnessed further by the memorable chorus from "Hellas":—

A power from the unknown God,
A Promethean conqueror, came;
Like a triumphal path he trod
The thorns of death and shame.
A mortal shape to him
Was like the vapour dim
Which the orient planet animates with light.
Hell, sin, and slavery came,
Like blood-hounds mild and tame
Nor preyed until their Lord had taken flight.
The moon of Mahomet
Arose, and it shall set:
While, blazoned as on heaven's immortal noon,
The Cross leads generations on.

When this stanza is put beside the one which follows it with a lament over the dispeopling of hills, streams, and woods of their ancient divinities, the reader begins to feel the significance of Shelley's religious instinct. He was in revolt against an idea of religion which made God a despot; he felt, on the other hand, the appeal of a faith which made Love not a mere sentiment of good-nature, but an impulse of sacrifice,—a vital and regnant force in the world. He was quite as truly repelled by an idea of religion which robbed the earth of its soul and expelled divinity to heaven; he had a sure instinct for that Divine Principle which works

in men and things to will and to do of His good pleasure: —

> . . . that sustaining Love
> Which, through the web of being blindly wove
> By man and beast and earth and air and sea,
> Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of
> The fire for which all thirst, now beams on me,
> Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality.[1]

No claim that Shelley ever organized his religious instinct and thought into a system is made or could be maintained; but none the less the witness of much that he wrote is all the more significant, because it testifies unconsciously to man's need of a Divinity Whose activities shall be as closely identified with the common concerns of humanity and nature, as His being and attributes transcend them.

[1] *Adonais.*

CHAPTER V

THE "EDINBURGH" AND THE "QUARTERLY"

To attempt a chapter upon the religious element in the work of the writers for whom this title stands may seem like undertaking an essay upon the Greek Kalends or the seacoast of Bohemia. The reader's first thought is likely to be that, whatever may have been the personal religious convictions of these men, their published works have "no religion to speak of"; certainly no religious significance for a later day. Has not Mr. Bagehot specifically noted the fact?

"A curious abstinence from religious topics [he says] characterizes the original Review. There is a wonderful omission of this most natural topic of speculation in the lives of Horner and Jeffrey. In truth, it would seem that, living in the incessant din of a Calvinistic country, the best course for thoughtful and serious men was to be silent — at least they instinctively thought so. They felt no involuntary call to be theological teachers themselves, and gently recoiled from the coarse admonition around them." [1]

Yet Bagehot has himself answered his own im-

[1] Bagehot, "The First Edinburgh Reviewers," *Literary Studies*, vol. i, pp. 183–184.

plied question; for in a memorable estimate and criticism of the Whig character in the essay just quoted, he has frequent recourse to the similes, figures, and general language of religion for the illustration of his theme. This necessity has its ground in nature; since all great intellectual, moral, and political movements have their religious implications, and the literary awakening of which the "Edinburgh" and "Quarterly" reviews, with "Blackwood's" and the "London" magazines were the fruit was preëminently such a movement. It was either inspired on the one hand or necessitated on the other by the Revolution. The "Edinburgh" was as natural an outcome of revolutionary impulse as the "St. Bartholomew of Abuses" or the guillotine; as the "Lyrical Ballads" or the "Ode to Napoleon"; while the "Quarterly" followed as logically as Napoleon himself, or the "Letters on a Regicide Peace."

After a hundred years it seems to us as though the Revolution suffered a material sea-change in crossing the Channel. Most of its English advocates have long since found their places among the respectabilities of literature; and so far as the changes for which they contended can be called revolutionary at all, it is revolution clothed and in its right mind, revolution not only Anglicized but be-Whigged, that they represent. It did not seem so, however, to English and Scots men of letters in the first decade of the new century.

As Hazlitt put it: —

"There was a mighty ferment in the heads of statesmen and poets, kings and people. According to the prevailing notion, all was to be natural and new. Nothing that was established was to be tolerated. . . . Kings and queens were dethroned from their rank and station in legitimate tragedy and epic poetry, as they were decapitated elsewhere. . . . The world was to be turned topsy-turvy; and poetry, by the good-will of our Adam-wits, was to share its fate and begin *de novo*." [1]

This represents, however, the impending change which a radical like Godwin might have hoped for, or a reactionary like Gifford feared, rather than the actual state of the case. A new poetry had indeed arisen with Wordsworth and Coleridge, to which Byron and Shelley had imparted a distinctly revolutionary character. It was natural, therefore, that a new criticism should arise, not merely of literature, but of life in its social and political aspects; and equally natural that this criticism should divide itself into two camps, one forward-looking and hopeful, the other reactionary and doubtful.

The "Edinburgh" and "Quarterly" reviews, dating their origin from 1802 and 1809 respectively, stand as the protagonists of these two forces. Late in the next decade they were followed by two monthly magazines, one of which, "Blackwood's," has for ninety years maintained a great conservative

[1] *The English Poets*, Lecture VIII.

reputation with brilliant success; while the other, known as the "London Magazine," lived a life so brief and chequered as scarcely to justify mention in company with its three contemporaries, were it not for the significance of the so-called "Cockney School" of writers, whose organ it practically became. Among the first Edinburgh Reviewers whom the world cares to remember were Horner, Jeffrey, Brougham, and Sydney Smith, of whom I take the last to be, upon the whole, the most significant and characteristic figure for our present purpose. The "Quarterly" numbered Gifford, Southey, Scott, and Lockhart among its early contributors, and two of them among its editors. Preëminent in the "Blackwood's" group were Lockhart, Wilson, and Maginn. The "London" could, for at least a brief period, look to a company of writers which comprised Lamb, De Quincey, Leigh Hunt,[1] Hood, and Hazlitt.

I am not disposed to assume the judgement-seat and to divide these men into groups of believers and unbelievers. It would be "to consider too curiously to consider so"; yet critics were not wanting in their own day to undertake the task. They of course saw in the "Quarterly" the recognized and confessed champion of a high Tory faith in Church and State as then established. Each number of the Review as it issued from the press was like incense

[1] I do not know that Leigh Hunt was himself a contributor; but he was in close association with those who were.

in the nostrils of the great god, Status Quo. The "Edinburgh" was the organ, not of revolution, as its "Quarterly" rivals would have it, but of the new Liberalism, which represented in some degree the effect of revolution upon independent and courageous, but none the less eminently conservative, British minds. In both politics and religion, the blue and buff of the "Edinburgh" stood for orthodoxy, but it was the Whig orthodoxy of reason rather than the Tory orthodoxy of tradition. "Blackwood's," which did not appear until the immediate stress of the great French wars was over, ranged itself on the Conservative side; but, as became a monthly magazine whose purpose was to amuse and instruct rather than to argue, defend, or convert, it exercised its partisanship after a somewhat tricksy and irresponsible fashion. The "London Magazine" as a periodical publication would, as I have intimated, have no especial claim upon our attention; but the Cockney School, which it may be said to represent, had some right to the name of radical. Hunt and Hazlitt held admittedly unorthodox opinions, while Lamb and De Quincey, though the latter aspired to be a defender of the current religious faith, were literary innovators.

Yet the reader who blows the dust from the tops of these early volumes and runs his eye over their pages finds himself wondering how they could have made so great a stir. Their politics are sufficiently various, but their references to religion are in gen-

eral studiously respectful and commonplace, the single exception worth noting to-day being the famous Chaldee Manuscript article in "Blackwood's," which takes somewhat daring liberties with the phraseology of the Book of Revelation. A brief glance at such titles as relate to religious topics will illustrate my meaning. The first volume of the "Edinburgh" discusses very temperately a sermon by Dr. Parr, and William Godwin's reply to it. It also criticises with a favour in which the note of calm reserve seems dominant, Paley's "Natural Theology." Only when Volume III undertakes a review of Necker's "Cours de Morale Religieuse" does the tone of trenchant criticism, which is a part of the "Edinburgh" tradition, sound with unmistakable clearness. In Volume IV the sermons of a certain Dr. Brown are reviewed, and the fact that, though a Presbyterian, he has seen fit to dedicate his book to the Archbishop of Canterbury, is selected for especially favourable mention.

The record for the early volumes of the "Quarterly" is almost equally colourless. Volume I undertakes a defence of the "Credibility of the Jewish Exodus . . . against Edward Gibbon, Esq.," which duly reaches its foregone conclusion. Volume II offers more religious and theological variety, in two articles which review in an excellent spirit "The Transactions of the Missionary Society in the South Sea Islands" and Paley's "Sermons and Memoirs"; while a third, dealing with a work entitled "Intol-

erance the Disgrace of Christians, not the Fault of their Religion," sounds the Tory note with greater distinctness. The Alexandrian School and its influence upon the Established Church are likewise discussed. A leader of the Clapham sect, to whom I shall have occasion to recur in the next chapter, falls under review in Volume IV, where a fairly liberal essay may be found dealing with "Lord Teignmouth and the British and Foreign Bible Society." It is evident from the tone of this article that the Society, synonym for respectability though it has since become, was then an object of scorn and derision in some quarters — a state of affairs fit to make one believe Sydney Smith's claim that he once heard Jeffrey speak disrespectfully of the Equator.

"Blackwood's" first volume[1] begins with a report of the proceedings in the House of Commons upon the death of the admirable Francis Horner, who had been one of the first writers in the "Edinburgh," and is as generous as need be. Further on it reviews favourably the work of Dr. Chalmers on "Christian Revelation viewed in Connexion with the Modern Astronomy"; and, as though to convince a later generation that there is nothing new under the sun, the article begins with the lament: "One of the worst features of the present times is

[1] I refer here to the number for April, 1817, some months before the leadership of Lockhart and Wilson began its real career with the publication of the Chaldee Manuscript.

the separation that has taken place between science and religion." As early therefore as 1817 this venerable plaint had grown familiar.

It must be evident even to the casual reader that the religious significance of these publications — if indeed they have any — lies deeper than the rather complexionless titles just cited. In a general way it may be maintained that in religion as in politics the liberals of the day were the true conservatives, while the ultra-orthodox, the worshippers of tradition and the *status quo*, were in unconscious league with revolution. This is simply to state a general proposition. Even if the Universe be not an organism, our experience of it is such that we are at least obliged to treat it as though it were. The great interests and relations of men as individuals and as societies seem to be of an organic sort. They never continue in one stay. Either they avail themselves of passing opportunity to adapt their frames and forms to their environment, as living creatures do by conquest and assimilation of some portion of circumstance; or else in refusing to do this they become themselves the food of circumstance, — their vital integrity is impaired; time and the hour have their will of them. The phrase 'adaptation to environment' is itself a partial and faulty one, because the process of life is in so real a sense mutual. The organism endures, not by a mere slavish adaptation of self to surroundings, but quite as truly by an adaptation of surroundings to

the interests of self. This is true even in organisms of the lowest sort; while as we go up the scale and the mystery of will develops, the domestication and cultivation of otherwise hostile or savage surroundings becomes a prime factor in organic history. The organism which exerts its power to put compulsion upon events, thus organizing inevitable change in the interests of life, not only lives but grows. The organism which through feebleness, sloth, obduracy, or lack of faith declines this task does not thereby inhibit change. It simply becomes its unwilling victim, and invites its approach in a hostile guise.

The Tory attitude was one of formal and ultra conservatism, based, as one trenchant critic has said, on "genuine, honest, craven fear." Lord Eldon has been generally recognized as its most characteristic exponent. His regard for the past was less that of an intelligent student of history bent upon appropriating its lessons for the future, than that of a blind worshipper of the thing that was, because it had been, because life had proved tolerable — at least for him as an individual — in connection with it, and because the least change might serve to loosen the keystone of the arch spanning the deep of chaos. When Sir Samuel Romilly proposed to mitigate the savage criminal code that prescribed death for over two hundred offences, he was frankly told that there was no telling where such a course would end. If he suc-

ceeded in abolishing the death penalty for picking pockets, there was nothing to prevent a similar step in favour of the thief who stole cloth from a bleachfield; and so on indefinitely, until the gallows should rot, the hangman starve, and society disintegrate. "I am for hanging all," was the memorable retort of one young squire to some new proposal of this apostle of mercy and justice. It was the shortest way, and it is ever a characteristic of "Hell's coëval, fear" to deal hurriedly with symptoms rather than dare a genuine investigation into causes.

No very penetrating insight is needed to discover how revolutionary such a course is bound to prove. It tends towards death and destruction, like every path where fear and doubt are guides, because it inhibits the one absolutely necessary function of life; since life means perpetual change in the adaptation of means to the ends of its own continuance. While the tree lives its innate vital principle enables it to feed upon 'weather.' As soon as its trunk is felled, every alternation of heat and cold, moist and dry, becomes the enemy of its fabric and hastens its decay. True conservatism consists, therefore, not in fending off change, but in fostering vitality and welcoming all change that accords with it.

The mere radical, on the other hand, is in danger of falling in love with change for its own sake and of rendering as superstitious a reverence to the

sword and ploughshare as his neighbour accords to the symbols of settled order. So far from looking back to the past and wishing to perpetuate its conditions, he forgets that there has been any past, or, if he remembers, it is only with a sort of scorn and hatred. Things seem to him to be so bad that mending them would be a waste of time; he would rather build anew from the foundations. He neglects two great facts. One is that all the foundation upon which he has to build comes out of this very past of which he is so contemptuous. The other is that he himself is more often ruled by hatred of what is than by love of what might be, and thus envy, malice, and uncharitableness are bound to obscure the clearness of his vision. He can build nothing that will stand until his astigmatism and strabismus are corrected.

Here as elsewhere the Via Media is the practicable way because it is based upon the truth of experience and lighted by the fundamental virtues of faith, hope, and love. It doubtless loses something in distinction, because it is so often the way of prudence and caution. The ultra-conservative clinging to the outgrown raiment of an elder time is a more conspicuous and a far more romantic figure than the plain man in modern clothes going about to-day's business. The ultra-radical makes a similar appeal to the spirit of untried adventure, and always strikes a responsive chord in some hearts. The weakness of the former lies in his

cynicism and selfishness; that of the latter in his bitterness. Both lack faith. One is contemptuous of past and future both, and of man's ability to profit by them. The other is contemptuous of history and discerns in its successive stages of experience barriers to human happiness, instead of platforms by means of which the fabric of human welfare may be enlarged and confirmed.

It is no part of my purpose to claim that any of these new publications proved to be a consistent embodiment of any one of these theories. Political and social theories are rarely perfectly consistent, whether they be good or bad; and their confessors are pretty sure to prove in practice better than the worst and worse than the best of their creeds. It was so in the period of which we speak. The Tory idea meant a cynical disregard of the rights of the masses in the interests of privilege; but the Tory party was not lacking in high-minded and honourable men, as will be abundantly illustrated in the next chapter. The Radicals held and proclaimed views that seemed subversive of society and religion; but did not always cease, therefore, from being good husbands and fathers. The Whigs maintained the worth of freedom; the right of each man to think, work, and worship as he was conscientiously inclined to do. They not only went upon the theory that these rights were sacred and that the welfare of society was bound up with their preservation, but they felt half instinctively that the masses of men

were destined to possess an increasing influence in government; and they strove, not always without difficulty, to regard this future with hope. Their main concern, theoretically, was the application to the present of the experience of the past, with a view to the amelioration of life's conditions in the future. It is to be noted, however, that the Whigs, although in possession of a generous creed, were not always therefore exempt as individuals from social and political prejudice or meanness; while, when it came to literary criticism, Whig and Tory both were quite capable of the most anarchic individualism. The whole matter has been admirably summed up by Bagehot in his famous estimate of the Whig ideal.

"The first wish of the Whigs is to retain the constitution; the second — and it is of almost equal strength — is to improve it. They think the body of laws now existing to be, in the main and in its essence, excellent; but yet that there are exceptional defects which should be remedied, superficial inconsistencies that should be corrected. The most opposite creed is that of the skeptic, who teaches that you are to keep what is because it exists; not from a conviction of its excellence, but from an uncertainty that anything better can be obtained."[1]

It is hard to realize at this distance of time the real conditions which the Tories sought to perpetuate and the Whigs to improve.

[1] *Literary Studies*, vol. i, p. 162.

"To appreciate the value of the 'Edinburgh Review' [says Sydney Smith], the state of England at the period when that journal began should be had in remembrance. The Catholics were not emancipated. The Corporation and Test Acts were unrepealed. The game-laws were horribly oppressive; steel-traps and spring-guns were set all over the country; prisoners tried for their lives could have no counsel. Lord Eldon and the Court of Chancery pressed heavily on mankind. Libel was punished by the most cruel and vindictive imprisonments. The principles of political economy were little understood. The laws of debt and conspiracy were on the worst footing. The enormous wickedness of the slave-trade was tolerated. A thousand evils were in existence which the talents of good and noble men have since lessened or removed: and these efforts have been not a little assisted by the honest boldness of the 'Edinburgh Review.'"[1]

So it is that when the "Edinburgh" for July, 1804, published the article entitled "A Concise Statement of the Question regarding the Abolition of the Slave Trade," we may claim that a distinctly religious note was sounded in so far as this discussion ministered directly to that doing of justice and love of mercy which are of the essence of religion. Its closing paragraph is so clear and wholesome that at the risk of a surfeit of quotation I venture to cite it.

"It appears to us, in short, that the Parliament of England have it now in their power to do a more

[1] Quoted by Bagehot, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

magnificent act of humanity and justice than was ever before in the gift of a legislative assembly; and that by this one law, they may, without injury to their country, deliver more men from suffering and exert a far more lasting, extensive, and beneficial influence on the fortunes of mankind, than by all the triumphant campaigns and successful negotiations of a century." [1]

I would not assert that this note of humanity and magnanimity is consistently characteristic of the "Edinburgh Review." In literary matters, as has been already intimated, it was not; still, wherever the voice of Sydney Smith was heard, soon or late it was sure to be sounded with a clearness and emphasis which could not be ignored. This jocund parson, with his fondness for good living, his dislike of 'enthusiasm,' and his contentment with the ways of the world, was yet after all a sort of Great-heart — a champion of the oppressed, and a guide along the way to the Celestial City. He was not so constituted as to appreciate Wesley or the Methodists. He probably could not have used — perhaps he could not altogether have understood — the language of Simeon and his fellow Evangelicals. They on their side might have claimed that, since spiritual things must be spiritually discerned, so gross and palpable a worldling was not likely to see very far into the mysteries of faith. Nor would they have been altogether wrong. The man was doubtless

[1] *Edinburgh Review*, vol. iv, p. 486.

blind to some things that are best worth seeing; but it is no less true that he was spiritually endowed with a courage, a capacity for self-sacrifice, a sympathy with the oppressed, and a passion (which he would very likely have denied) that made him a sort of apostle of essential Christianity. Critics have been divided, like teeth, into incisors and molars, and Sydney Smith included in the latter class. However true this may be with reference to his criticism, his passion for righteousness and fairness of dealing was of the molar sort. Its processes were relatively deliberate, as compared with the enthusiastic passion of his Methodist contemporaries for souls; but a passion it was none the less. Now and then he recognized its existence and reverently acknowledged its source. "If," he said, "you ask me who excites me, I answer you, it is that Judge Who stirs good thoughts in honest hearts — under Whose warrant I impeach the wrong, and by Whose help I hope to chastise it." [1]

It is difficult to think of a prophet as 'buxom'; yet were not that adjective the prerogative of robust and comfortable women, it is precisely the word which one would choose to characterize, not only Sydney Smith's person but his faith as it translated itself into good works through nearly two generations. His championship of the slave, his valiant exposure of the awful condition of madhouses, or hospitals for the insane, his persistent

[1] Quoted by G. W. E. Russell, in *Sydney Smith*, p. 225.

claim that the Catholics should be emancipated, and his serene assurance that, despite the evil he had seen and exposed, his own lot and that of his fellows was gradually growing better, were all fruits of a faith that was essentially religious. The comfortable optimism of a robust mind and a well-nurtured body fails to account for it. There was a deeper element of spiritual and ethical conviction, which shows sometimes through the veil of humourous allusion wherewith he loved to conceal it. One may find illustration of this in his whimsical but unquestionably sincere advocacy of temperance, — for considerable periods of his life he was a pretty consistent water-drinker, — and in the frank thankfulness with which he recognized the deepening seriousness of the clergy among whom his later days were spent. "Whenever you meet a clergyman of my age," he told Mr. Gladstone in 1835, "you may be quite sure he is a bad clergyman." [1]

The religious element that was most notably incomprehensible and even antipathetic to the Edinburgh Reviewers was the mystical. They had some understanding of the worth of doing justice; some inkling at least of a love of mercy; but the walking humbly with God, at least as multitudes of devout souls understood the act of personal communion with an ever-present Deity, was beside their experience. Hence it came to pass that in the

[1] Gladstone's *Gleanings*, vol. vii, p. 220; quoted by Russell, in *Sydney Smith*, p. 163.

realm of literature Jeffrey proved blind to the deeper significance of Wordsworth; while in that of religion more narrowly considered, Sydney Smith could not understand his Methodist and Evangelical neighbours, and, stranger still, failed to respond to the heroic adventure of the early foreign missionaries — an adventure which will finally be recognized as conferring upon his century one of its chief marks of distinction. There was ground enough for a little good-natured raillery at the worthy souls who inaugurated a special packet service between London and Margate, and ordained that upon their hoy there should be nothing but serious conversation, — readers of Leigh Hunt's Autobiography will remember his youthful adventure upon the craft; but William Carey should have been spared. No doubt his journal, taken by itself, may contain passages calculated to raise a smile, so naïvely and intimately does he use terms of sacred and tremendous import. The fact is, however, that the journal never can be taken by itself. At a century's distance we behold in it the narrative of an apostle not unworthy to rank with the first great Twelve. The secret of this blindness in one direction, which contrasts so vividly with exceptional clearness and breadth of view in others, has been discerned and set forth so admirably by Mr. Bagehot, that once more I must have recourse to his words. In speaking of the Whig aversion to mysticism he says: —

"A clear, precise, discriminating intellect shrinks at once from the symbolic, the unbounded, the indefinite. The misfortune is that mysticism is true. There certainly are kinds of truth, borne in as it were instinctively on the human intellect, most influential on the character and the heart, yet hardly capable of stringent statement, difficult to limit by an elaborate definition."

Thus we have the phenomenon of Jeffrey's criticism of Wordsworth, which Bagehot interprets in its representative and universal significance.

"Nature ingeniously prepared a shrill, artificial voice, which spoke in season and out of season, enough and more than enough, what will ever be the idea of the cities of the plain concerning those who live alone among the mountains; of the frivolous concerning the grave, . . . of the common concerning the uncommon; the notion of the world of those whom it will not reckon among the righteous,—it said, 'This won't do.' And so in all time will the lovers of polished Liberalism speak concerning the intense and lonely prophet."[1]

Among the "Quarterly" group there was rather more room for such things of the spirit as were content to find expression in conventional forms. Religion was a part of the Tory stock in trade. It was forced to live in the uncongenial company of great narrowness and bigotry on the one hand; but on the other it proved true to its nature by occasionally rearing, even in such thorny soil, flowers and

[1] *Literary Studies*, "The First Edinburgh Reviewers," p. 174.

fruits of rarest beauty. Of men like Gifford, even at this stretch of time, when the bitterness of prejudice has been assuaged, not much can be made. His was a narrow nature, and he stands out as almost the only literary adversary to whom Leigh Hunt in his charitable old age could not pay some kindly tribute. Concerning the greatness and wholesomeness of Walter Scott's faith in God and man I shall have to speak in a later chapter; as well as of the company of High Church enthusiasts, true sons of the Romantic movement, who stirred all England by their zeal, the purity and devotion of their lives, their consummate literary gifts, the cogency of their logic — and the woful inadequacy of their theological and ecclesiastical premisses.

Of Southey, however, more needs to be said. He played a larger part in the literary history of the period now under review than it is quite easy to realize to-day. It would doubtless have surprised and pained him could he have seen his present undistinguished place in the firmament of literature; for, though free from silly vanity, he thought of himself as a star of very nearly the first magnitude, and spoke repeatedly of his assurance of an immortality of fame. He was not altogether wrong in this latter conclusion, although he mistakenly based it upon his poetry, much of which is but rhythmical prose and is already forgotten, instead of upon his essays, biographies, and letters, which are still worth reading and occasionally read, and upon his brave, gra-

cious, and extraordinarily toilsome life, the memory of which is to-day as fragrant as ever. I am aware that it signifies little in criticism to say that a poet was a good man,— the character of the late Mr. Tupper was doubtless as unimpeachable as that of his "Proverbial Philosophy,"— but in Southey's case the character of the man, his patience, unselfishness, and devotion, his rare sense of honour and consistent reverence, his unobtrusive yet quietly masterful piety, are of the essence of his work in letters. They must be taken into account in summing up the influence of the essayists and reviewers of his day; and they go far toward justifying and in some respects redeeming the influence of the "Quarterly." Southey had the gift, much needed in his camp, of perceiving and appreciating the better side of men. He could not have sympathized with the relations of Nelson and Lady Hamilton; but he could see that the famous signal flown from the Victory on the morning of Trafalgar was a truer commentary upon the essence of Nelson's manhood than the cry of "Poor Lady Hamilton!" which so closely prefaced his last words. "Consecrated cobblers," especially among Dissenters, were probably almost as far beyond his comprehension as they were beyond that of Sydney Smith; and as Churchman and Tory he was by no means an ideal biographer for John Wesley. But none the less the essential greatness of Wesley, his embodiment of faith, hope, and charity, together with the enormous industry which

he brought to their translation into terms of common goodness, were too close akin to all that Southey reverenced, to escape recognition and honour. Religion was recognized in all he thought and wrote as a great and vital concern of life; and with characteristic boldness of design he at one time laid a plan to make every great mythology the basis of a narrative poem. Conservative though he became in his reaction from the French Revolution, he never lost faith in his fellows or degenerated into practical skepticism of the Eldon type, but kept to the end his love of liberty and his sympathy with all good men. Now and then, as in "Goody Blake and Harry Gill," or the "Battle of Blenheim," and even more notably in his wife's[1] "Tales of the Factories," and "The Pauper's Deathbed," is heard a clear premonition of the 'Social Question' which was destined to exert so powerful an influence upon the religious and literary history of the later half of the century.

Reference has already been made to the "Chaldee Manuscript" with which "Blackwood's" made its second and effectual appeal to the notice of the reading public. Whenever the secondary and incidental influences of religion upon literature come to be reckoned up, this clever bit of irreverence must needs be remembered. It was a keen and impertinent characterization of some of the best-known men in the

[1] His second wife, Catherine Bowles, whom Southey married late in life, but with whom he had long been in affectionate sympathy.

literary circles of Edinburgh. The genius which Wilson and Lockhart unquestionably possessed for the new journalism would, under any circumstances, have conferred a sort of dubious distinction upon the article. Their daring choice of the framework and style of the Book of Revelation gave it notoriety. Both of these writers, as well as Blackwood himself, who retained for some time the practical editorial management of the new monthly, were men whose irreverence was incidental rather than essential, and the experiment was not spoiled by repetition. Wilson's name is the one most intimately associated with the early days of the magazine, and his robust, full-voiced style gave it a characteristic tone. It would be an artificial and perhaps less than candid task to attempt to trace any especial religious influence which "Blackwood's" may have exerted; but it is true that Wilson and his compeers did something — it is probable that they did a good deal — toward making possible a freer treatment of religious topics in the essay form. The most casual glance at the contents of our more thoughtful contemporary reviews will show how large a place and how free a treatment is given to religious and ethical questions. Equal rights are accorded to believer and to skeptic, though with a slightly warmer welcome, perhaps, for the believer in one magazine and for the skeptic in another. There is no denying the wide influence of such discussions as that between Mr. Huxley and Mr. Lilly in the eighties; and the way

toward this "fair field and no favour" seems to have been blazed by the "Blackwood's" group, though they themselves did not reach it, and, had they done so, would perhaps have been at some loss how to comport themselves there.

Midway between this Edinburgh set and those who were at first contemptuously called the "Cockneys" stands De Quincey; but it suits my present purpose to group him with Lamb, Hunt, and Hazlitt. They form a very notable quartette; for Hazlitt's place is preëminent among English critics; Lamb's mastery of the essay was and is unique; Hunt was *par excellence* the journalist, a lord of the special article, one who could be interesting if not authoritative upon compulsion of the hour and the printer's devil; while De Quincey may fairly be called the great rhetorician of the former half of his century.

Hazlitt was of Unitarian antecedents and marked by the more unlovely Unitarian characteristics. There can be no question of the debt under which this particular sect has laid the world of thought in general and the world of literature in particular. But it has been singularly fruitful in spiritual Ishmaelites. Its 'liberalism,' instead of creating an atmosphere in which the positive worth of all honest belief is clear to see and easy to assimilate, has too often degenerated into a sort of Pharisaic distemper with all such men and things as will not pronounce its particular shibboleths of negation.

As a clever and good-natured critic has recently put it: —

"It is quite proper for one to hope that he is liberal, — we ought all to hope it, — while in our more sanguine moments we might even confide to an intimate friend or two that we believe we *were* liberal, but none of us have any more right to go around publicly proclaiming that we are liberal than we have to go around saying, 'I am a gentleman,' or 'I am good-looking.' This decision must in the nature of things rest wholly with our neighbours." [1]

There was, however, in Hazlitt a measure of truly discerning liberality. He has put upon record his fascination by Coleridge and the influence which that most fructifying thinker exerted upon his mind. Whether he derived his liberality from Coleridge or not, it reflected much that was best in Coleridge's attitude towards men and books — the attitude of the 'understanding heart.' In a day when criticism, having revolted from the classic norms of the eighteenth century, had fallen a prey to individual whim and party passion as represented by the critical free lances of the "Edinburgh" and "Quarterly" reviews, Hazlitt did much to organize a saner and more generous method. He understood the true office of a critic to be that of interpretation, and he brought a singularly discerning mind and trenchant style to its fulfilment. So far forth

[1] J. S. Zelie, in an essay upon *Our Denominational Paradoxes.*

he was generous in purpose and in act. But there remained a mordant, atrabilious temper which led him to think and boast of himself as a radical. As has been intimated, the radical is a very necessary member of society. His uses are manifold until he becomes enamoured of his own radicalism; when his self-conceit and general viciousness prove just as disagreeable and dangerous to society as any other manifestation of conceit and folly.

The contrast in this respect between Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt is interesting and instructive. Hunt was a radical whose trumpet of heresy gave forth no uncertain sound. He held views upon the questions of marriage and the relation of the sexes that seemed to align him with Godwin and Shelley. Yet he proved himself to be an affectionate and devoted husband and father; not very wise or efficient, to be sure, in his headship of the family, but free from all taint of conjugal unfaithfulness. He was moreover an incidental preacher of Universalism. No one can read his "Autobiography" — and all lovers of literature ought to read it — without a half-amused sense of his assurance upon the final destiny of all the race. There were to be no exceptions. By hook or by crook, by grace or by violence, Leigh Hunt would have all men to be saved. He had all the weakness as well as the strength of that rather futile good-nature which rushes blindly to this conclusion. His creditors clamoured for their just dues, the bailiff struggled with the wolf for a place at

his door, his household gods were habitually in slovenly disarray, — how slovenly, Carlyle has told us in a passage as cruel as it is unforgettable, — his boys were growing up to be bad copies of their father's less lovely aspect; while with serene benevolence and unflagging industry Leigh Hunt toiled on to old age, a book or a pen ever in his hand, cheerful, improvident, loveable to the last. No man in the literary history of his century better illustrated that grace which suffereth long and is kind. He wielded a sharp pen, but never an ill-natured one. The keenest criticism to which he was subjected, and even the reputed caricature as Harold Skimpole by his friend Dickens, could not sour his temper or long depress his spirits.[1] His "Autobiography" is redolent of peace and goodwill. He understood Shelley; he was so loyal to the memory of Keats as to cry "Peccavi" and burn his faggot publicly, when he discovered that Keats thought him remiss as a champion, although his offence seems to have been a sin of omission discernible by no eye less keen than that of the invalid poet's own captiousness; and he was charitably just to the strange mixture of iron and clay in the figure of Byron. Without Hazlitt's power to see into the deepest things of literature, he was vastly

[1] In view of Dickens's express disclaimer, it would seem unjust to charge him with this lapse of a by no means faultless taste. There is a distinction, and a broad one, between deliberate caricature and the ascription to an imaginary character of certain traits that may have been suggested by a real one.

more humane and gracious in his dealings with the makers of literature; and it is a matter of thanksgiving that a journalist of such notable powers and such radical convictions should have maintained upon the whole an attitude of such consistent reverence toward all things pure, lovely, and of good report.

This same spirit of deep reverence for the essence as contrasted with the temporary forms and phrases of religion characterized Hunt's elder and greater friend, Charles Lamb. He is perhaps the best-loved figure in all English letters; and when we come to put the question why, we are driven for answer to the dutifulness, self-sacrifice, and unfailing affection which graced the life, as truly as to the unique genius for the intimate essay and epistle which made the man of letters. The daily walk and conversation was in one aspect of it unlovely enough. There is nothing especially winsome about the India House drudgery, honourable as it was; and there is much that is positively painful in the growing thirst for and dependence upon gin and brandy. Let us keep the sordid words; they comport best with the seamy side of the man's life. How seamy it sometimes looked may be inferred again, as in Leigh Hunt's case, from the pitiless revelations of Carlyle, though it must be remembered that in such matters Carlyle had the beak and claws of a harpy. Yet, in spite of all, Lamb's place remains secure, the "Letters" not less than the "Essays" buttressing it with every

semblance and promise of perpetuity. The secret of it has been discerned by many but best set forth, perhaps, by Mr. Birrell. Readers of his "Obiter Dicta"— may their tribe increase! — will remember the essay upon "Truth-hunting," and the passage which its author quotes from "Elia" as illustrating the attitude which Mary Lamb took toward the revolutionary opinions of her brother's friends.

"It has been the lot of my cousin, oftener, perhaps, than I could have wished, to have had for her associates and mine free-thinkers, leaders and disciples of novel philosophies and systems, but she neither wrangles with nor accepts their opinions."

Then follows the memorable comparison with Coleridge sitting upon Highgate Hill, and asking, "What is truth?" while Lamb, abiding in his always anxious and sometimes agonized home, contents himself with the humbler query, "What are trumps?" It is put with wondrous cleverness, though with somewhat scant justice — at least one hopes so — to Coleridge. Be that as it may, however, Lamb will always remain an appealing and inspiring figure to such as realize the measure of his devotion to a father who was half imbecile and a sister who periodically became wholly insane. No English writer has better claim upon our attention when he exhorts us "to cultivate the filial feelings"; and through all his work there runs an undercurrent of influence toward the cherishing of the great

Christian graces. He rarely preaches; but he is always taking them for granted as the only reliable props and supports of life; they make it bearable when otherwise its perplexities and burdens would be too great for us. Thus Lamb's humour is at once robbed of all cynical bitterness and takes on a sort of haunting, wistful quality, as though he saw at once the incongruity and possibility of life, and was inspired by a confidence that experience here or elsewhere would somehow suffice to make the ideal plan complete.

De Quincey occupies a position midway between the Edinburgh and the Cockney groups. His "Confessions of an Opium-Eater" appeared in the "London Magazine"; but the far larger portion of his most characteristic and significant work was produced and published in Edinburgh. Of the group of essayists whom I have individually characterized, he is the only one who set himself definitely to the defence of current Christianity. He had a certain zeal for religion which led him to wrestle with Hume's time-worn and hoary argument against miracles, — not very successfully, be it said, owing to the plain fact that Hume's argument has a certain validity against a very false but almost equally prevalent notion of what a miracle may be. De Quincey hated Frenchmen, too, which may have commended him to the straiter sects of the godly as a fit defender of the faith. He lived and wrote in the heyday of suspicion of France and all her

works; when she had ceased to be an armed antagonist whom England was bound to respect, and had relapsed into the position of a remembered anxiety — the cause of former stress and sorrow. The whole system of her religion, philosophy, politics, and morals — so far as she was supposed to have morals — was under the ban. "Statesmen saw its absurdity, holy men were shocked by its impiety, mercantile men felt its effects upon the five per cents." [1] Yet, in spite of De Quincey's adventure as a defender of the faith, he has perhaps less significance for our immediate purpose than his contemporaries. More than almost any other man in our literature, with the possible exception of Sir Thomas Browne, his eminence and claim upon our memories are due to his mastery of rhetoric. Ruskin vied with him, to be sure, but Ruskin made other claims upon his readers than those of a rhetorician, and it may be questioned whether Ruskin were in any such sense the master — as distinguished from the servant — of the art of expression as De Quincey. Of course the latter is at times merely flamboyant; but when he is at his best there is a power in his gorgeous phrasing which the veriest ascetic in literary taste and habit must acknowledge. Indeed, for myself, I am quite capable of a severely critical atti-

[1] I trust that the slight anachronism involved in this paraphrase of Bagehot's words — for the quotation is not quite exact — may be forgiven me. He was speaking of a somewhat earlier day; but the British habit described is not yet outgrown.

tude toward him and all other rhetoricians after a decent period of separation and neglect; but if by chance the "Confessions" open at some of the greater visions, or an excerpt from "Our Ladies of Sorrow" beguile me in turning the pages of a cyclopedia, his foot is on my neck — I am his man again.

In one or two respects, however, De Quincey admirably illustrates the indebtedness of literature to the language and the deeper emotions of religion. As in the case of Sir Thomas Browne and Ruskin, he has constant recourse to the Bible for the framing of his most splendid periods. Take for instance the well-known passage from the "Philosophy of Roman History," commenting upon Gibbon's description of the scope of a Cæsar's sway; from which he turns to the lot of the later emperors themselves.

"The imagination of man can frame nothing so awful — the experience of man has witnessed nothing so awful — as the situation and tenure of the Western Cæsar. The danger which threatened him was like the pestilence which walketh in darkness, but which also walketh in noon-day. Morning and evening, summer and winter, brought no change or shadow of turning to this particular evil. In that respect it enjoyed the immunities of God — it was the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. After three centuries it had lost nothing of its virulence; it was growing worse continually: the heart of man ached under the evil and the necessity of the evil.

Can any man measure the sickening fear which must have possessed the hearts of the ladies and the children composing the imperial family? To them the mere terror, entailed like an inheritance of leprosy upon their family above all others, must have made it a woe like one of the evils of the Revelation, — such in its infliction, such in its inevitability." [1]

Or turn to the "Suspiria de Profundis," and reread the passage describing Our Ladies of Sorrow. It is too long for quotation, though its earlier sections, dealing with Madonna, Our Lady of Tears, and Our Lady of Sighs would reënforce the effect of the quotation just made, so alive are they with the language and imagery of Scripture. The closing paragraph, however, deals with a yet more urgent application of religious impulse to the power and purpose of letters.

"But the third sister, who is also the youngest — ! Hush ! whisper whilst we talk of *her !* Her Kingdom is not large or else no flesh should live; but within that kingdom all power is hers. Her head, turreted like that of Cybèle, rises almost beyond the reach of sight. She droops not; and her eyes, rising so high, *might* be hidden by distance. But, being what they are, they cannot be hidden; through the treble veil of crape which she wears, the fierce light of a blazing misery, that rests not for matins or for vespers, for noon of day or noon of night, for ebbing or for flowing tide, may be

[1] De Quincey's *Works*, Riverside Edition, vol. vii, p. 333.

read from the very ground. She is the defier of God. She also is the mother of lunacies, and the suggestress of suicides. Deep lie the roots of her power; but narrow is the nation that she rules. For she can approach only those in whom a profound nature has been upheaved by central convulsions; in whom the heart trembles and the brain rocks under conspiracies of tempest from without and tempest from within. Madonna moves with uncertain steps, fast or slow, but still with tragic grace. Our Lady of Sighs creeps timidly and stealthily. But this youngest sister moves with incalculable motions, bounding, and with a tiger's leaps. She carries no key; for though coming rarely amongst men, she storms all doors at which she is permitted to enter at all. And *her* name is *Mater Tenebrarum* — Our Lady of Darkness."[1]

We shall have occasion to recur to this weird Spirit of Unbelief in commenting upon some of the most characteristic utterances of the latter half of the century. De Quincey limned her features with strange foresight, as though in the light of her eyes he had caught a prophetic glimpse of Thomson's "City of Dreadful Night," Tennyson's "Despair," and John Davidson's "Ballad in Blank Verse," — each in its way the epic of such as find themselves without hope and without God in the world. He witnesses anew to the interdependence of literature and religion, and the fact that for the purposes of the former "Gods are needed, if only to be defied."

[1] De Quincey's *Works*, Riverside Edition, vol. i, pp. 244–245.

CHAPTER VI

CLAPHAM AND OXFORD

"You seem a very temperate people here," said Mr. Birrell to a Cornishman, when on a walking tour in that delectable duchy; "how did it happen?" The miner raised his hat reverently as he made answer, "There came a man amongst us once, and his name was John Wesley." [1] The smoke of sectarian battle is still too thick for men to see quite clearly how much that is most substantial, wholesome, and therefore permanently influential in her life, England owes to the Wesleys and the revival of religion which they did so much to promote. The profit of their work is somewhat more freely acknowledged in America than in England, though even there Methodism is too often known by its accidents rather than its essence. Mr. Kipling's verses upon a great national celebration are of no less telling application to periods of religious awakening: —

> The tumult and the shouting dies —
> The captains and the kings depart;
> Still stands Thine ancient sacrifice,
> An humble and a contrite heart.

[1] *Res Judicatæ*, "Cardinal Newman."

It is a little difficult for the plain man to see why tumult and shouting should be counted so essential to political and patriotic rejoicing that their absence throws doubt upon its sincerity, while at the same time their presence in the case of widespread and deeply stirred religious feeling is reckoned equally suspicious. In point of fact they represent but the expression of a passing mood in either case — a mood which moreover is often the creature of something close akin to the mob-spirit, and marked by its epidemic character and liability to quick revulsion. The fire and the earthquake having passed, the attentiveness with which the still, small voice of genuine revelation is heard and heeded determines the value of the whole experience. That is measured in terms of humility, contrition, and service.

In attempting to reckon up the account in the case of Wesley, the Anglican is still prone to be supercilious and the Methodist bumptious. The mismanagement of the whole matter by those in ecclesiastical authority in Wesley's day was as expensive to the Church of England as the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes proved to France. Both resulted in the practical banishment, in one case from the Church and in the other from the nation, of great numbers in whom the hope of the future dwelt. Institutions, like trees, receive their most substantial sustenance from beneath; they cannot afford to ignore or oppose these agitations in the

earth about their roots, which, while they often disturb the accustomed order and form of mere circumstance, and sometimes threaten the rootlets of the upper soil, always give more than they take by bringing air, light, and moisture to the roots themselves.

There is of course a sense in which the Church of England is the mother of Methodism. The Wesleys belonged to her by birth, training, conviction, and affection. They were loath to quit her ministry: but they had their vocation; the day's work must needs be done; and when church doors were closed they had necessary recourse to fields and commons. That which is barred from the door, however, sometimes makes its entrance through the window, and Methodism did its work upon the Church. The zeal of Anglican writers to prove that the Evangelical movement was not of Methodist or Wesleyan origin is a little hard to understand. The Wesleys and Whitefield were men of whose work any church and any university might well be covetous; but for my present purpose I am content to allow the disclaimer. The fact seems to be that the Wesleyan influence upon life and thought in the Anglican communion was similar to that which an electrical current induces in an adjacent coil. The induced current is not an integral part of the original movement; but none the less the latter is accountable for it. So, while the Evangelicals may not look to the great Itinerants as to their spiritual fathers,

still, the new life which began to appear in the establishment toward the close of the eighteenth century was a phase of the same awakening. In so far as this awakening was theological, the Evangelicals within the English Church generally sided with the Calvinism of Whitefield and Toplady as opposed to the Arminianism of the Wesleys. So far forth the Evangelicals may be said to have carried on the great Puritan tradition; so far forth, too, they may seem to represent the sterner and less lovely aspects of the revival.

Certain reservations must, however, be made at this point. With singular unanimity it seems to have been admitted that the Puritans were not only deficient in a sense of humour, but lacked it altogether. Deficient they may have been in some degree; though I incline to believe the deficiency to have been apparent rather than real. That they were without the sense of humour altogether is not for a moment to be admitted by any one who looks beneath the surface of their life or studies the characteristics of their descendants. It is entirely true that the Puritans of the seventeenth century and the Evangelicals of the nineteenth lived in a world of tremendous realities upon which their thoughts were trained to dwell, and about which they spoke and wrote. All their public utterances were pitched to this key. Life was too great a business to afford much scope for levity. The eye of the Great Taskmaster, the Atonement through which appeared

the conflict of God's love and justice, the profound moral issues of daily life, and the sure expectation of a final Assize whereat these issues were to be forever determined to each soul, — these were among the realities of Puritan life. No wonder that, being what they were, they became its transcendent realities. No wonder, either, that the solemnity which necessarily attached to their contemplation gave a generally sober and occasionally sombre hue to the life and words of these men as the world saw them. This attention to the detail of walk and conversation was doubtless over-scrupulous sometimes, and it afforded a cover for incidental hypocrisy. The misfortune is that the occasional formalist and yet more occasional hypocrite should have been accepted by too many careless writers as typical. In point of fact the self-control which was the Puritan's habit gave him a generally clear eye; the contemplation of high themes helped him toward vigour of mind; and the belief in great mysteries stirred his imagination. From such a man life could not hide her little incongruities and her amusing contrasts. To be sure, there were great incongruities, too, and contrasts that were terrible. These overshadowing matters must needs have due reverence paid them; but in the shadows there were rifts of sunlight where children might play and friends laugh together.

Colonel Hutchinson, for instance, was a Puritan, but no morose stifler of mirth. An ancestor of the

present writer came to New England in 1635, a soldier of nineteen. His companion-in-arms and lifelong friend was a young engineer officer who had served his apprenticeship in the Low Countries. Together they were shut up in a little seaboard fort and close beleaguered by the savages. Both were godly men after the Puritan fashion. Both lived to old age, and in later years, when settled upon their separate grants of land, occasionally corresponded. Fragments of this correspondence still survive; and it is interesting to notice that after a score or two of years one of the things of which they remind each other is the heartiness of their old-time laughter in the very mid-winter of distress, when "Captain Hunger" had already effected an entrance into their entrenchments and the savages were hard upon his heels. Nor can any one familiarize himself with the traditions of Puritan communities without obtaining abundant evidence of the clear vision, the alert imagination, and the gift of succinct and shrewd expression which characterized their people. In the older New England villages it is no uncommon thing to find sayings of certain families handed down from generation to generation,[1] which testify by their keenness of observation, their whim-

[1] One of these sayings of a good-naturedly cynical old maid relates to the venders of kitchenware with whom she sometimes dealt and against whom she as often took up her parable. "She had never bought anything of a tin-peddler," she was wont to declare, "that failed to leak, but once — and that was a strainer." A small joke to be sure, but significant of a humourous habit.

sical exaggeration, and their gently sub-acid quality, to the abounding humour of the elder days.

A similar caveat needs to be entered against the general ascription of gloom and inhumanity to the Evangelical character as it appeared in England during the first three decades of last century. The Evangelicals were, to be sure, serious people; but a modicum of seriousness whets the appetite for many of life's most wholesome pleasures, precisely as temperance and a taste for plain food garnish the dinner-table with a zest which the epicure may seek in vain. It is true that the forms of this seriousness were easy to imitate; and that a good deal of Philistinism as well as some downright hypocrisy was enrolled under the Evangelical banner; but it is none the less a pity that the literary treatment of the Evangelicals should so often have been by way of caricature. The professional 'literary person' seems especially prone to illiberality in matters of religion. Desirous of cultivating lightness of touch, and very conscious of the general appetite for ridicule, the hypocrite and the religious *poseur* play no small part upon his page. So enamoured of them does he sometimes become as to forget that men do not counterfeit bad money. The hypocrite and formalist of fiction is often but the distorted reflection in an imperfect mirror of some honourable and constructive life.

This digression is due to the fact that the Evangelicals seem to the present writer to have been

seriously wounded in the house of their friends. Their contribution, either direct or indirect, to English literature is very considerable, and they deserve better treatment at its hands. It has been contended by one eminently competent to maintain his point, that a chief distinction between Newman and Wesley was the lack of charm in the case of the latter as contrasted with the confessed fascination of the former.[1] The contention may be admitted; but we must beware about wholesale admissions of the sort when we come to an estimate of the later Evangelicals. The group about Clapham Common, which Sydney Smith nicknamed the "Clapham Sect," is a case in point. I shall use the term broadly, as representative rather than definitive, since it may fairly include men like Simeon and Milner of Cambridge and possibly even a Unitarian, like Clarkson of anti-slavery fame.

When a man is accused of diametrically opposite vices, there is considerable ground for hope that his life may have been guided by sweet reasonableness. The Evangelicals of the Clapham type have been thus accused of a severity and sternness which seemed to put the goal of true religion at the end of a long and forbidding vista of asceticism; they have also been regarded as adepts in the gentle art of reconciling a stern and rugged creed with a very considerable indulgence in the good things of this world. The villas about Clapham Common were un-

[1] *Res Judicatæ*, "Cardinal Newman."

questionably the scenes of many serious conferences, much debate upon high and awful themes, and occasional prayer meetings. They also had their modest interludes of cakes and ale. Yet few of those who have undertaken to portray them seem able to see more than one side of the whole experience — with the single great exception of Sir James Stephen.

I have elsewhere ventured upon an estimate of the high place in English letters belonging to the "Essays in Ecclesiastical Biography."[1] Those who would make a friend of one so eminently friendly as Sir James Stephen always shewed himself when he took up the reviewer's pen must seek him there; and those who would learn what manner of men the leading Evangelicals of the early century were, and gain some inkling of their influence upon English life and letters, will give especial heed to the three essays upon "The Evangelical Succession," "William Wilberforce," and "The Clapham Sect."

[1] See *The Dynamic of Christianity*, p. 186. Since that page was written my attention has been called to Sir Leslie Stephen's reference to these essays in the Life of his brother, Sir James FitzJames Stephen.

"I will not," he says, "express any critical judgement of their qualities; but this I will say: putting aside Macaulay's *Essays*, which possess merits of an entirely different order, I do not think that any of the collected essays re-published from the *Edinburgh Review* indicate a natural gift for style equal to my father's. Judging from these, which are merely the overflowing of a mind employed upon other most absorbing duties, I think that my father, had he devoted his talents to literature, would have gained a far higher place than has been reached by any of his family." — *Life of Sir James FitzJames Stephen*, p. 55.

Coteries are by their nature self-centred; and there can be little question that, in form at least, the frequenters of Henry Thornton's oval drawing-room by Clapham Common — a room designed by William Pitt — deserved the name and reputation of a sect. But they were saved from the sectarian fate of meagreness of soul by the character and the ambitions of the sectaries. It is difficult for the writer of to-day to attempt a characterization of these men without having recourse to Sir James Stephen's words, so graphic are they and grouped in such sonorous periods.

John Thornton, a rich and benevolent London merchant, is known to all lovers of Cowper as a consistent friend of the poet, and one who distributed considerable sums in charity through his hands and those of his neighbour, John Newton. Thornton's son, Henry, inherited his benevolence, his wealth, and his attachment to Evangelical principles. He entered Parliament and represented there not only his immediate constituents, but that best type of independent legislator who takes conscience as well as party into account and insists that conscience shall speak the determining word. However easily his lips may have framed the Evangelical watchwords, his life forbade any candid critic from denying that they were rich in content. Memoranda discovered after his death shewed that during his earlier life not less than six-sevenths of his income had been given in benevolence. Later on, when

increasing family cares and expenses forced him to reduce this portion to one-third, he yet seems never to have given in charity less than two thousand pounds a year. Twice at least he made large demands, not upon income only but upon capital as well, in order that he might satisfy creditors of embarrassed firms who could have no legal claim upon him, but who might have been influenced, he thought, to trust their debtors by the countenance which he or his partners had given them. He made it a rule not to increase his estate but to distribute its surplus yearly. How wisely this was done, in the view of modern scientific charity, I do not know; but the consistent generosity of his heart and life is beyond doubt. "As a legislator," says Sir James Stephen, "he had condemned the unequal pressure of the direct taxes on the rich and the poor; but instead of solacing his defeat with the narcotic of virtuous indignation combined with discreet parsimony, he silently raised his own contribution to the level of his speech."

Intimately associated with Thornton in residence, humanitarian endeavour, and religious sympathy, was William Wilberforce. No estimate of the Evangelicals of Clapham can be genuinely honest which does not take into account the character and work of this extraordinary man. Whatever opinion may be had of his learning, his eloquence, or the disinterestedness of his philanthropy, the fact of his personal charm seems beyond cavil. It is as well

established as that of Cardinal Newman himself; and while he has left us nothing for a moment comparable to Newman's work in letters whereby to judge him at first hand, the verdict of those who came into social touch with him, including so competent a critic as Madame de Staël, is practically unanimous. Yet he was not without fame as an author; for his "Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes of this Country contrasted with real Christianity," notwithstanding its portentous title, passed through some fifty editions in as many years, and exerted, we are compelled to believe, a considerable influence upon its multitudes of readers. Not least among its claims upon our gratitude is the comfort which, in his last hours, it brought to Edmund Burke.[1]

Nor was the charity of this good man narrowed by considerations of personal creed or pet philanthropy. He was a zealous Evangelical Protestant, converted by an experience which must have satisfied the straitest of his sect; and there is little reason to suppose that he rejected the orthodox Evangelical interpretation of the Scarlet Woman. This could not blind him, however, to the burdens which oppressed his Catholic countrymen; nor did he make his lifelong championship of the African and preoccupation by it a pretext for silence when silence would have seemed politic.

[1] *Essays in Ecclesiastical Biography*, vol. ii, pp. 252–253.

"He was a zealous advocate of the claims of the Roman Catholics, not only in 1797, when men's hearts were failing them for fear, and in 1805 and 1808, when even his own gallant spirit partook of the general consternation, but in 1813 and 1821, when the baser motives for conciliating that part of our fellow-countrymen had ceased to operate. For at each successive period he was guided by the same immutable conviction that Christian truth must be independent of any such human policy as that which fettered the Roman Catholics, and was far too high and holy a thing to be defended by an offensive and irritating exclusion of its opponents from the exercise of any political franchise." [1]

When the alleged narrowness of the Evangelicals is affirmed, and legitimate fun is made of Granville Sharpe's disquisition upon the Little Horn in the prophecy of Daniel, it is for the candid student to recall Wilberforce's consistent generosity of creed and life, Granville Sharpe's loyal comradeship in service with a Unitarian like Clarkson, and Thomas Gisborne's delight in country life, and the zeal for 'natural history' with which he matched his devotion to his parish and his interest in the multifarious Clapham philanthropies.

I cannot stop to deal in any detail with Isaac Milner, the robust president of Queen's College, Cambridge, upon whom as a conversationalist something of Johnson's mantle seems to have fallen. He was a scholar of repute, a mathematician of contempo-

[1] *Essays in Ecclesiastical Biography*, vol. ii, p. 267.

rary eminence, and an Evangelical of deep convictions, though of somewhat humourous and lethargic habit. Nor can I do more than mention in this connection Zachary Macaulay and the Trevelyans, John Shore (Lord Teignmouth), Charles Simeon, who with Milner led the Evangelicals at Cambridge, James Stephen, father to Sir James Stephen of the Colonial Office and the "Essays in Ecclesiastical Biography," Henry Martyn, and the Venns. A volume might well be written upon the last-named family — a family of clergymen since Elizabethan days, of sturdy faith and steady zeal, fearless, practical, shrewd, godly men.[1] The Henry Venn of Huddersfield was a contemporary of Wesley, a mighty cricketer in his youth, and the author of the "Complete Duty of Man," which is to be reckoned as one of the original documents of English social and religious history, so profound was its influence upon three generations of English clergymen. John, his son, was Rector of Clapham, the immediate spiritual guide of the Sect, and one of the founders of the Church Missionary Society. His son, another Henry, maintained the family traditions, and has been commemorated by no less competent a judge than Sir Leslie Stephen for his industry, piety, cheerfulness, shrewdness, and abounding humour, — a matter all the more germane to our present inquiry because Sir Leslie takes

[1] I understand that such a volume has been published by a descendant of the house within a year or two ; but my acquaintance with it is only by way of a review.

pains to note that this humour was resolutely kept out of his writing, as though putting pen to paper were too solemn a business to allow of it.[1]

It is at this juncture that an impatient reader might well ask what these good men have to do with English literature. Among them all there is no name of first-rate importance to letters. The answer must be that the first generation of the Clapham Evangelicals had a deal to do with English thought, and that whatever profoundly influences the thought of a people is bound to tell in a generation or two upon letters. Sir James Stephen said of Charles Simeon that "he waged inexorable war with the slumbers and the slumberers of his age"; and the alertness of his crowded Cambridge congregation which hung upon words so earnest and heart-searching that no grotesqueness of the preacher's form or manner could belittle them, admirably illustrates the statement. Indeed it is well-nigh as applicable to the Sect in general as to Simeon in particular. The religion and the benevolence of these men refused to rest in generalities. They insisted upon coming to particulars, sometimes to such minute particulars as to seem peddling and irreverent to men of keener æsthetic sense. But the promoters of the anti-slavery agitation, the Church Missionary Society, the British and Foreign Bible Society, and the inaugurators of that conscientious concern for the welfare of others

[1] *Life of Sir James FitzJames Stephen*, pp. 33–41.

which mitigated the severity of the criminal code, passed the Factory Acts, and organized the multifarious charities for which in the next generation Lord Shaftesbury stood sponsor, could afford some infelicities of form and manner. Their substance was genuine and has stood the test of time.

Their immediate words, as committed to paper by their own hands, have little claim to literary permanence. Yet even these are no negligible factor in English and American history. The works of Simeon consist mainly of sermons, sometimes but the ghastly skeletons of sermons, and such books as are rarely seen and never read outside of clerical libraries. But for his disciples the breath of the Spirit caused these bones to live and made a wonderfully effective army of them. Their message spoke again in thousands of English and American pulpits and homes. A corresponding influence was exerted by the "Church History" of Joseph Milner, as revised and carried on by his brother Isaac, whom a pupil once characterized as a "sort of Ajax-Andromache, combining such might with such sensibility as to make him at once admirable, loveable, and inefficient." It is in no sense a critical work; yet it possessed qualities which gave it a deserved popularity, portions of it were translated into German and widely read upon the Continent,[1] while it is scarcely too much to say that during the first half of last century it was the generally accepted

[1] See *Life of Dean Milner*, by his niece, pp. 334, 335.

authority of English-speaking Protestants upon the Reformation. The popularity and influence of Wilberforce's "Practical View" has already been noted, and a hasty reference made to Granville Sharpe's love of expounding apocalyptic Scriptures. These expositions are among the curiosities of literature, and one would give much for a detailed and authentic account of the interview in which that good man and valiant paladin undertook to convince Charles James Fox that Napoleon's career was already foretold in the Little Horn of the Book of Daniel. No one, however, can better afford a smile at his eccentricities than this apostle of freedom, in whom, as in Henry Martyn, the age of chivalry was reincarnate. His genuine contributions to history and literature are the pamphlets which he made the means of a courageous championship of the cause of America during Lord North's administration, the conversion of Lord Mansfield to an interpretation of English law which made slavery impossible at home, and the persevering advocacy of the abolition of the trade abroad.

A wider and somewhat different influence upon letters was exerted by Lord Teignmouth and Henry Martyn. John Shore, Lord Teignmouth, had spent a laborious life in the service of the East India Company, and had advanced by degrees from the humble position of "writer" to the governor-generalship, when the newly organized British and Foreign Bible Society called him to a place which

was destined to assure him a measure of fame denied to the ruler of India. As president, he brought something more than his presence and name to the councils of the society. His identification of himself with its interests was as real as it was sympathetic. His faith in Scripture was as unquestioning as that of Lord Shaftesbury himself; and his oriental scholarship gave him a fitness for the post which Lord Shaftesbury must have lacked. He was the master of a ready but uninspired pen, and nothing of his own composition ever threatened long to survive his day. But the work of the society whose policy he directed is of distinct moment. The Sacred Books of nations exert a peculiar influence upon their literatures, and the missionary teacher and translator is one of the most significant figures in the history of letters — how significant let Ulfilas among missionaries, or Wickliffe and Luther among translators, bear witness.

Henry Martyn was the beau ideal of missionary adventurers. I use the term advisedly, and in its worthier sense of one who dares something for a great cause. He was a youth of romantic temper and unusual abilities, who, after a distinguished university career which brought him under the influence of Simeon, went out to India as a chaplain of the East India Company. Measured by years, his life was so brief as to seem thrown away, for he died in Persia, at the age of thirty-one. But, reckoned by character and deeds, it proved to be one of the

notable careers of the new century; for there was a certain distinction about it — an unusual capacity for 'earthly' enjoyment, held subject to a celestial ambition, the evidence of keen intellectual powers devoted to the highest good of others, a very human romance, too, of heartily requited love to which circumstance denied the consummation of marriage, that made Martyn's life singularly influential in the history of Christian missions. It served to inspire a multitude of those who followed him in the work of preaching, teaching, and translating the literature of Christian civilization.

As I have before intimated, it is yet too early to estimate at its true worth the significance of Christian missions to literature. The missionary is supposed to be generally a man of fair natural abilities and of good average training. He is often a man of the keenest intelligence heightened and inspired by the most benevolent of ambitions. His very purpose in going out leads him into sympathetic acquaintance with the deeper things in the life of those among whom he labours. It is the almost universal rule that barbarous or savage peoples find their most valiant champions and most sympathetic interpreters among missionary workers. Furthermore a prime duty of the missionary consists in the translation of the Christian Scriptures, together with works upon ethics, medicine, grammar, and elementary science, into the vernacular, wherever this has already reached the dignity of a written

language. If it have not, then its development into grammatical form becomes one of his first tasks. Only as the reader ponders upon this vast world-movement, with its direct influence upon the speech and incipient literature of a thousand languages or dialects, and its reflex influence — no less real though as yet but partly realized — upon letters at home, can he grasp the significance of such undertakings as the Bible Society, over which Lord Teignmouth presided, the Church Missionary Society, of which John Venn was the projector, and the adventure to which Henry Martyn gave his life. Martyn's "Journal" belongs to English literature by the influence which it has exerted, if not by reason of its purely literary quality; as does the journal of David Brainard, and the lives of men like Selwyn, Livingstone, and Coleridge-Pattison, to say nothing of some missionary hymns, which, like those of Bishop Heber, have literally sung themselves around the world.

A far more patent and generally recognized bequest of the Clapham brotherhood to letters appears as we consider the two families of Zachary Macaulay and James Stephen, connected as they were, or as they soon became by marriage, with the Venns and Trevelyans. Macaulay is, of course, one of the most widely known names in English literature. The most famous exponent of it had the good fortune, as essayist, historian, conversationalist, and poet, to build his popularity upon so substantial a foun-

dation of talent and attainment as to possess every reasonable assurance of permanent fame. The "Lays of Ancient Rome" may not be great poems; but their claim to popularity is genuine rather than specious. They possess the true martial lilt, the gallant note, that leads boyhood captive at the first assault, and surprises the cooler blood of middle age into a boyish warmth. Withal they possess a homely quality which, without rubbing any of the bloom from romance, still brings the classic legend into touch with modern life, so that the plain man of to-day perceives in Horatius and his fellow heroes men of like passions with himself. Something of this same quality of perfect perspicuity combined with a romantic sense shows in the "Essays" and the "History." Lord Macaulay, whether he speaks by the book or at the bidding of a most eloquent prejudice, is always intelligible, and generally logical. His prejudice, too, is almost invariably generous in so far as it attaches itself to the cause of freedom and the rights of the many as opposed to the privileges of the few. He is no cynic, — though he may occasionally turn a cynical phrase at the bidding of a tyrannous literary instinct, — but, as his biography shows, a very tender-hearted man; though the man is, to be sure, sometimes lost in the reviewer and the Whig.

In what degree did Macaulay inherit the Clapham tradition or illustrate the Clapham influence? The most valiant special pleader must hesitate to

number him among the Evangelicals. Tender as was his attachment to his family, it would be difficult to think of him as at home in a conference of his elders upon theological or missionary topics. Yet after all, he is his father's son. The Evangelical watch-words are not congenial to him; they seem threadbare and jejune; none the less he knows the sound of *shibboleth* and can say it, if he chooses. His characterization of Bunyan is suffused with Evangelical intelligence, if not warmed by Evangelical sympathy; and his definition of Protestantism in the essay upon Ranke's "History of the Popes" bears the Clapham hall-mark plain upon it.[1] Nor can any adequate estimate be formed of the quality of Macaulay's style without taking into account his training in the Bible and his saturation with Scripture phraseology. His infant outburst against the maid who had disarranged the pebbles marking off his little garden-plot: "Cursed be Sally! For it is written, Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark!" is prophetic of the terrible and rhetorically exaggerated indictment of Barère at the close of the essay upon that worthy.

"This makes the character complete. Whatsoever things are false, whatsoever things are dishonest, whatsoever things are unjust, whatsoever things are impure, whatsoever things are hateful, whatsoever things are of evil report, if there be

[1] For a brief criticism of this definition, see *The Dynamic of Christianity*, Introduction.

any vice, or if there be any infamy, all these things, we know, were blended in Barère."

The passage shows Macaulay's use of Scripture at its worst, but it illustrates how deeply he had drunk of the spring which refreshed Clapham speech, even though in this instance he seems to have caught but little of its essential spirit. The temptation to turn a sounding phrase was always liable to betray his judgement; but upon the whole, one is bound to admit that in his books, his speeches, and his talk, he strove to follow the more generous Clapham traditions. After all, his was a sort of reforming eloquence, enhanced and refined by the broadest literary cultivation and by much contact with the world. In it there was always something of the humanitarian bent of his father, Clarkson, and Granville Sharpe, though the eager zeal which characterized them had been bereft of its crudity — and of something of its convicting power as well — by passing through the sieve of Cambridge and the "Edinburgh Review." In other words, Clapham was to Macaulay as the enthusiasm of Exeter Hall at its best was to the benevolence of the more enlightened of the Whigs.

England and America have equal reason for gratitude that the best traditions of the family have been continued in our own day by Sir George Otto Trevelyan, in the memorable "Life of Lord Macaulay," the "Early History of Charles James Fox," perhaps the most brilliant historical and political monograph

in the language, and in the "American Revolution," a study of this momentous quarrel which is as sympathetic and intelligent in spirit as it is fascinating in style. Nor does the younger generation of this distinguished house lack its worthy representative in the field of letters, as the growing work and repute of Mr. George Macaulay Trevelyan abundantly attest.

As we turn to consider the contribution which the Clapham Sect made to life and letters through the family of James Stephen, a new problem presents itself. Some of the straiter Evangelicals brought the accusation against Sir James, son of the Clapham James, that the orthodoxy of his "Essays in Ecclesiastical Biography" was open to suspicion, especially with reference to the doctrine of eternal punishment, "a doctrine which at that time enjoyed considerable popularity," as Sir Leslie Stephen somewhere says. Could they have lived to read the works of his two sons, James FitzJames and Leslie, they might well have thought that the nemesis of heresy had indeed overtaken him. It should be remembered that these two brothers, both of whom exerted a marked, even though a somewhat temporary, influence upon the thought of their century, had a double claim to the Clapham heritage; for their mother, who was a daughter of John Venn and a woman of great beauty and distinction of character as well as of person, was native to the Common. She lived to see—and to see with a

composure equal to that of Charles Lamb's cousin Bridget — her sons not only accept but promulgate opinions which to their grandparents must have been anathema.

Concerning the validity of these views I am not at present concerned to express any judgement. The term 'rationalistic'[1] is hopelessly loose and lacking in definite content; yet it was, I suppose, dear to both these representatives of an Evangelical family, and I venture to maintain that their attachment to it marked the legitimacy of their spiritual descent. For the Calvinism of the Evangelicals was essentially a rationalistic system of thought and faith. True, the fundamental assumptions were assumptions indeed; but then, so are the ultimate premisses of every system — even of mathematics. The true meaning of *Omnia abeunt in mysteriis* is, "All things start in metaphysics as well as issue in mystery!" The premisses having been assumed, however, the true Calvinistic method had primary reference to the processes of logic rather than the experiences of life. It loved God with a passion which was almost exclusively mental, if such a phrase may be admitted. Thus it prepared the way for a school of theologians whose influence should seem to be altogether, and should really be in part, hostile to Christian faith, though they were, as the present writer at

[1] How "Rationalism" has become a cant term, sacred to a sect, may be seen by any casual reader of the Introduction to Mr. Benn's recent *History of English Rationalism in the Nineteenth Century.*

least ventures to believe, not only necessary consequences of the artificiality which had characterized earlier systems of religious thought, but no less necessary cleavers of the ground for the reconstruction of faith that was bound to follow.

FitzJames Stephen was a lawyer, journalist, and judge; Leslie Stephen was preordained to letters, though in an extraordinary passage in his autobiography he seems to express a half-whimsical doubt whether he ought not to have pocketed his scruples and followed his earlier purpose of taking orders. As it was, he became a most useful servant of his own and later generations through his capacity for an exalted kind of hack-work, by which it is safe to say he will be gratefully remembered long after his more original contributions to nineteenth-century theology and ethics have been forgotten. Some one called FitzJames Stephen a Calvinist with the bottom knocked out. In his younger brother's case not only the bottom went, but a majority of the staves as well; yet the significant thing in both cases is rather that which remained than that which was taken. To the very end it seemed as though neither could dissociate the thought of Christianity from the theology of Clapham. While the casual reader is noting the points of difference, his more thoughtful neighbour is pondering upon the notes of direct spiritual descent.

"Did you ever know your father do a thing because it was pleasant?" asked Lady Stephen one

day of FitzJames. "Yes," answered the boy, "once —when he married you"; and Sir Leslie records the fact that his father once smoked a cigar but found it so delicious that he never smoked again.[1] Something of this same contempt for selfish indulgence, the same exaltation of personal responsibility, the practical deification of Duty, appears in the life and work of the elder son. It seems natural that, Utilitarian though he had become, and inclined to base all action finally upon the desire for happiness, he should still reply to his own question, "Can you love such a Being?" (*i. e.* as the God in Whom he believes), "Love is not the word I should choose, but awe"; while elsewhere he records his conviction that "conscience is that which lies deepest in a man." No better instance could perhaps be cited to illustrate the degree in which Calvinism is a translation of Stoicism into the terms of Christianity, or how pervasive and haunting its majestic form continues to be long after its vital fire has grown cold. To the end, despite their habitual girding at theology, both brothers seem to find their deeper interests bound up with questions of religion, either upon its theological or upon its ethical side.

So large a portion of this chapter has been given to the Evangelicals that I must deal but briefly with their Oxford successors. There is the greater justice in this because the fascination of the Tracta-

[1] *Life of Sir FitzJames Stephen*, pp. 61–63.

rian Movement is so great that its very gossip has enjoyed a currency denied to the history of the earlier school, the gleaning of the grapes of Oxford seeming more to the public taste than the vintages of Clapham. In spite of Mr. Benn's recent attempts to prove the contrary, the Oxford Movement was essentially romantic. It accorded well with the new spirit which breathed upon the dry bones of English poetry and fiction. This breath of revolution could not fail ultimately to reach the Church and popular thought upon matters of faith. The question which Oxford faced was whether its influence should take the form of German criticism and what the Common Rooms called "neology," or whether it should be turned into institutional and conservative channels. The institutional bent of the English mind when dealing with matters of religion has been repeatedly exemplified, from the days of Hooker's "Ecclesiastical Polity" to those of Maurice's "Kingdom of Christ." The Englishman is ever a lover of the concrete and tangible. Even the Clapham Evangelicals could not rest until their vision of truth was incarnate in an Anti-Slave-Trade agitation, a Church Missionary Society, a Bible Society, and a well-organized attack upon the brutality of the criminal code. Just as naturally the new spirit at Oxford drove those whom it possessed to an endeavour to realize anew the life of the ancient church, and to accord modern Anglicanism with it.

Yet the typical Tractarian was something more than a mere *laudator temporis acti*. He found himself in a period of transition, as one who had suddenly awaked from sleep and opened his eyes upon strange and half-sinister surroundings. Nothing in such a case is more welcome than a voice of stalwart and confident authority. This he set himself to seek and was long in finding. It was conspicuously lacking in the earlier Oriel School, composed of intelligent and liberal-minded men, who seemed content, however, to take the new day as it came, without much concern as to its definitions or the ultimate trend of its influences. This is not to characterize Hawkins, Whately, Hampden, and Arnold as men of little faith. Instead, their attitude toward the future was confident enough, but it was in some measure the attitude of the opportunist. They were content to see the future come in an assurance that the Spirit of Truth would supply strength and wisdom adequate to its day. That is the attitude of courage and hope, but men who take it not infrequently fall into the error of seeming to ignore the past, to be a little contemptuous of defining their position in the present, and to treat authority cavalierly. Such was the situation which Keble, Hurrell Froude, and Newman faced at Oxford in the early thirties.

Newman himself represents an immediate link between the Tractarians and the Evangelicals. His early training had been of a distinctly Evangelical

type, and a thorough grounding in the Bible had an influence upon his style as marked in its different way as in the case of Macaulay. He has himself set forth his indebtedness to Walter Mayers of Pembroke College, who put into his hands one of Romaine's works which was instrumental in confirming if not in causing his conversion. To Thomas Scott, the famous Evangelical commentator, he says, that, humanly speaking, he almost owed his soul. Joseph Milner supplied him with his earlier ideas of Church history, and Newton convinced him that the Pope was Anti-Christ.[1] It was only by degrees that the conviction grew upon him that "Antiquity was the true exponent of the doctrines of Christianity and the basis of the Church of England."[2] Granting this conviction, the student of the Oxford Movement at once catches a glimpse of one secret of its authority, its charm, and its incidental literary quality. With liberal ideas making distinct way in the University, while debate upon Catholic Emancipation and the Reform Bill raged without, it was but natural that there should be reaction in so conservative an atmosphere as Oxford habitually breathed.

Moreover, the romantic movement, though it had pretty nearly spent its first influence among men of letters, was in the heyday of its power among the people. Wordsworth and Coleridge were coming to

[1] *Apologia pro Vita Sua*, pp. 4–7.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 26.

their own, Sir Walter Scott, just dying, was at the zenith of his fame, Byron, just dead, was a name to conjure with. It was an opportune moment for the revival of the spirit of antiquity in religion; and the fact that the protagonists of this revival were men of uncommonly active imaginations and alert minds, as well as masters of the peculiar cultivation which Oxford affords, gave further assurance of the influence which the movement was bound to exercise upon letters.

A passing glance at the characters of Keble and Newman will suffice to illustrate this. They were foreordained to sympathy and coöperation, though the circumstances of their several trainings were sufficiently diverse to keep them apart for a time. Keble came up to Oxford from a High-Church home, and while little more than a boy, captured nearly all the honours that the University could give him. Though incapable of self-seeking or any cheap bidding for influence, he had become a power in Oxford when Newman with his Evangelical training and his liberal tendencies matriculated, in 1817. It was a memorable day when a friend with whom the freshman was walking suddenly cried, "There's Keble!" and, although nothing then promised an intimacy between the two, Newman was already cherishing such reports of Keble and his ways as were going about the University. Gradually they drew together, until, when Keble preached his famous sermon on "National Apostasy," in July, 1833, the Oxford

Movement, which was to enlist their common sympathy and command their united support for the next twelve years, was fairly launched. Keble was then Professor of Poetry. His "Christian Year" had been published in 1827. Newman was Fellow of Oriel, Vicar of St. Mary's, and a preacher whose life and words were making him one of the notable formative influences among a group of brilliant undergraduates and scholars. He had published little. His first book, "The Arians of the Fourth Century," was just about to appear, and most of the poems by which he is best known had been written in the previous winter.

The progress of the Tractarian Movement as a revival of religion, theology, and ecclesiasticism is a little beside our present task. It remains to point out somewhat more explicitly, however, the singular place which it has occupied in English letters. The "Tracts for the Times" have long been grey with well-deserved dust; but the "Christian Year" has gone wherever English is read. Like every collection of verse written to complete a cycle, it bears here and there the stamp of task-work; yet it distinctly raised the tone of religious poetry. Hazlitt once criticised Campbell's "Pleasures of Hope" for its amiable but general debility, as though the author had mistaken the decomposition of prose for the composition of poetry,[1] and Bagehot echoes the gibe in his reference to "sacred poets" as those who thrive

[1] *The English Poets*, p. 288.

by translating the weaker portions of Wordsworth and Coleridge into the speech of women.[1]

The Oxford Movement is not guiltless in this respect; no revival which finally assumed so pronounced a ritualistic form could fail of degeneracy, or miss the day when, in its literature as in its worship, the stress of appeal to the senses must stifle instead of stimulate the appeal to the heart and will. But at the beginning it was not so. Even the hectic zeal of Hurrell Froude had its literary quality. Ill-balanced as he was, and utterly ephemeral as his influence promised to be, his life still makes its appeal to literature. It is characteristic of him and the movement which he did so much to inaugurate, that as this chapter is written a stately volume by an accomplished American lady should appear, to tell again the story of his brief career, and that the publishers should announce a new history of the Revival as a whole. I chanced the other day to take down from the shelves of a university library the same copy of Mozley's "Reminiscences" which, as an undergraduate, I had read upon its first publication. The stamp of untrustworthiness was plain on almost every chapter — yet the volumes were as beguiling as ever.

The secret of this undeniable charm begins to appear as we turn back to the "Christian Year," the "Lyra Apostolica," and the "Parochial Ser-

[1] *Literary Studies*, vol. i, essay on the "Early Edinburgh Reviewers."

mons." Keble and Newman were men of great intellectual gifts, fired by an intense but controlled zeal for what they thought to be a great cause. The former combined a fine boyishness, which put him at once into sympathy with his pupils, with so deep a seriousness that his lightest reproof was sometimes long remembered. "Froude," said he once, after his pupil had entered the coach to leave him, "you thought Law's 'Serious Call' was a clever book; it seemed to me as if you had said the Day of Judgement will be a pretty sight." The implied rebuke could as little be resented as forgotten, and produced a profound effect upon Froude's life. It is of value to us as illustrating the keenness of insight and delicacy of touch which characterized these two leaders of Oxford thought. Both were responsive to the appeal of Nature, Keble, as the "Christian Year" shows, preëminently so. Both were men of very considerable subtilty of mind, combined with great simplicity and directness of address. Though neither seems to have sought a following, or aspired to be the leader of a party, their zeal and purity of life, combined with their discernment of hearts and their quick sympathy with those who were in travail of soul through intellectual doubts, brought friends and disciples to them. Keble, however, remained relatively in the background. His ideal life seems to have been that of the country clergyman, preaching to rustics, visiting in cottages, keeping the flame of worship alight on the altar of a quiet village church,

teaching such pupils as might seek him in his retirement, and touching the great world without through the medium of his university connections and by his verses. Such gifts and qualities as these, enlisted in the service of a fine imagination and a very genuine piety, were bound to work memorable results. Memorable seems exactly the word, for there is a haunting quality about the best work both of Keble and Newman which grapples the memory as with hooks of steel. Such a passage as the two stanzas beginning —

> Why should we faint and fear to live alone,
> Since all alone, so Heaven has will'd, we die?

will illustrate my meaning in the case of Keble; while Newman's "Lead, Kindly Light" has become one of the best-known hymns in the language, though no more worthy of universal appreciation than the jubilant, —

> Praise to the Holiest in the height, —

written many years later; nor any more marked by a discernment of the depths of human experience than the exquisite verses entitled "Sensitiveness," or the lines upon his sister's death, beginning —

> Death was full urgent with thee, Sister dear.

English prose has, perhaps, owned no master who was Newman's equal in the art of lucid succinctness. A volume of commentary upon the sadly misunderstood Beatitude concerning the meek might conceivably say less than his one sentence, "Sheep are

defenceless creatures; wolves are strong and fierce: yet the wolves go hungry, and the sheep are fed." Readers who are very little in the way of reading sermons may well give a half hour to the "Parting of Friends," with its poignant text, "Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening," — a text which at once aligns the impending personal separation which the preacher had in mind with the universal, age-long experience of Man, the Pilgrim of the Universe. The single phrase "poisoning the wells," whereby, in his Introduction to the "Apologia," he characterizes certain charges of his opponents, is worth reams of elaborate argument; while the "Apologia" itself is a great 'human document' worth almost as much to psychology as to literature, and at least half justifying Mr. Birrell's charitable extravagance when he spoke of Newman as one whose "long life has been a miracle of beauty and grace, and who has contrived to instill into his very controversies more of the Spirit of Christ than most men can find room for in their prayers."[1]

To attempt any enumeration of the works which owe their origin to the Oxford Revival would be as far beyond my power as it is beside my purpose. Volumes grew out of it like the works of Hugh James Rose, Charles Marriott, and Dr. Pusey, which have no place in literature at all. Other volumes, like Ward's "Ideal of a Christian Church," make a

[1] *Obiter Dicta*, First Series, "Truth-Hunting."

sort of dubious claim upon the reader because of the unique character of the author as well as the equally unique experience of the book. Public condemnation by a great English University represents a title to fame not easily gained during the last century; but it was grotesque enough to comport well both with the physical and mental equipment of William George Ward. In memoirs the Movement has been as prolific as in controversies; its "Lives" are legion; while its echoes, in "The Oxford Movement" of Dean Church, and the "Oxford Counter Reformation" of J. A. Froude, represent distinct contributions to literature as well as to the history of English thought. Something of the mysticism which was sure to accompany so romantic a religious awakening may conceivably have touched the spirit of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, and certainly inspired some of the poetry of Christina Rossetti. It brought into being the splendid translations of John Mason Neale, and occasioned the more popular and somewhat sentimental hymns of Father Faber, to whom must also be accorded the dubious fame of writings upon the doctrine of Eternal Punishment so lurid, that for the moment not only Newman's terrible arraignment of the "Sinner before the Judgement-Seat" seems mild, but even the worst (and, alas, best-known) sermon of Edwards pales its ineffectual fires.[1] Nor should the student overlook the influence

[1] The reader who is so ill advised as to desire further acquaintance with this phase of Father Faber's work will find matter to his taste

of the movement upon a considerable number of men, who, though never immediately identified with it, yet found their sympathies awakened by its ideals. England has profited inestimably by the personal character of such men as Mr. Gladstone and Roundell Palmer among her statesmen and judges. The fact that they were less exceptional than eminent in the purity of their lives and the worthiness of their ambitions, constitutes one of the most notable elements of contrast between the public life of the third quarter of the nineteenth and that of the corresponding portion of the eighteenth centuries, when so very mundane a saint as the Earl of Dartmouth could win a sort of fame because he prayed, and men like Sandwich and Grafton exemplified the too general tone of public and private morality among the upper classes. Whenever this undeniable advance in life and letters comes to be appraised, no small portion of the inspiration and influence which caused it will have to be referred to the two great movements of religious thought for which Clapham and Oxford stand.

in an article entitled, "Rationalism and Apologetics" in the *Edinburgh Review* for July, 1906.

CHAPTER VII

ELIJAH AND ELISHA: CARLYLE AND RUSKIN

"Do make religion your great study, Tom; if you repent it, I will bear the blame forever." So, in 1819, wrote Carlyle's mother to her gifted son. She hoped, as only a Scottish mother could, to see him one day in a pulpit; but she longed with a yet deeper longing to make sure of his part and lot in her own faith. He had just confessed to some negligence in his reading of the Bible, but added the reassuring fact that he had spent the evening before with his favourite Job, and hoped to do better in the future. That picture of the restless and half-distraught young teacher, conscious of powers which must enable him to go far, but terribly in doubt as to the direction whither, dwelling upon the afflictions, contradictions, patience, and integrity of Job, is significant. One wonders whether, as he reached the later chapters, which set forth the marvels of earth-shaking behemoth and man-defying leviathan, any whimsical inkling of their application to his own future character and fame could have dawned upon him. Were this credible, it would be safe to aver that the hyperbolic imagery which depicts the wonders of great and unrestrained power must

have chimed with his grim humour. He is the despair of critics, unless, indeed, they be cock-sure and shallow; and to these, as they turn their little phrases, one is tempted to cry, —

"Wilt thou play with him as with a bird? or wilt thou bind him for thy maidens? I will not conceal his parts, nor his power, nor his comely proportion. Out of his mouth go burning lamps, and sparks of fire leap out. He beholdeth all high things: he is a king over all the children of pride."

In his "Reminiscences" Carlyle says of his father: —

"In anger he had no need of oaths: his words were like sharp arrows that smote into the very heart. The fault was that he exaggerated (which tendency I also inherit), yet . . . for the sake chiefly of humourous effect."

So ingrained was this humour and so incorrigible and often unrestrained was the habit of exaggeration, that it is only in terms of half-whimsical hyperbole that the man can be set forth. Words of measured truth and soberness take hold upon him as little as arrow and spear upon the armour of leviathan. Hence I incline to credit our greatest master of rhetorical extravagance with the most comprehensive and approximately just verdict upon his character. Carlyle, says Mr. Swinburne, was a typical sturdy peasant, "brave, honest, affectionate, laborious, envious, ungrateful, malignant, and self-

11625

ish."[1] The list is as portentous as a group of Mr. Swinburne's adjectives must always be, but, if there be libel here, it is in the implied estimate of the peasant in general rather than in the expressed judgement upon Carlyle in particular.

To call him selfish is only to reiterate a fact that lies patent upon the pages of his own reminiscences and his wife's journal; and the adjective must still stand, after all allowance has been made for her somewhat ungracious nature, the greatness of the tasks that absorbed him, and the fact that most husbands engaged in preoccupying duties seem selfish to their wives, — who shall say without just cause? "Malignant" is a heavy word and not to be lightly used. So good a man as Thomas Arnold blotted a page of his own biography by writing the "Oxford Malignants" for the "Edinburgh." But even he did not venture to call the author of the "Christian Year" an ass. Carlyle did so, and went on not only to designate Keats as a "Vessel of Hell," but to characterize his biography as a "Fricassee of dead dog."[2]

No other man of his day, not even Hazlitt, could have brought himself to be so consistently con-

[1] *Nineteenth Century*, vol. xv, p. 604.

[2] Justice perhaps requires a citation of the paragraph, though to lovers of Keats it may intensify rather than mitigate Carlyle's offence. "The kind of man he [*i. e.* Keats] was gets ever more horrible to me. Force of hunger for pleasure of every kind, and want of all other force . . . such a structure of soul, it would once have been very evident, was a chosen 'Vessel of Hell.'"

temptuous or so incidentally nasty — there seems to be no other word — toward Coleridge and Lamb, as was Carlyle. Nor is it possible to explain away the exasperating patronage with which he endured men and women of eminence whom he could find no cause to damn, or the faint praise wherewith he did damn Mill, except upon the ground of a self-conceit that made him envious of all abilities and powers comparable to his own. He could not see his wife shine at her brilliant best in company without irritation, nor could she quite do her best apparently without some whetting of her wits at his expense; a mutual attitude which lends point to the remark "that after all it is well they married each other; since, had they not, there might have been four unhappy people in the world instead of two." The famous phrase, "mostly fools," whereby he chose to designate twenty or thirty millions of his fellow citizens, has its humourous side, and may easily be forgiven him; yet, like the little Book in the Apocalypse, its dubious sweetness in the mouth speedily turns to bitterness; while his exasperating references to Miss Martineau as "the good Harriet" after her unwearied and successful efforts in his service; the contempt with which he loved to characterize the authorities by whose aid he had built the great structures of the "Revolution" and "Frederick"; to say nothing of his attitude toward people who, like the Bullers, had honestly striven to befriend him in a day when friends were worth

his having, all suggest a starveling sense of gratitude.

On the other hand, what student can fail to pay homage to the enormous labour which went to the making of his books — books, be it remembered, which, even when historical, were still works of the poetic imagination in such degree as would have seemed to justify a less diligent man in treating the toil of research lightly.

"The French Revolution stands pretty fair in my head, nor do I mean to investigate much more about it, but to splash down what I know in large masses of colours, that it may look like a smoke and flame conflagration in the distance."[1]

Thus he describes, and with wonderful truth, the scheme of his great impressionist panorama; but he does not say, though the world knows to-day, how mightily he had toiled at his 'sources,' nor with what general good effect, in spite of all that later critics have striven to show to the contrary. Affectionate, too, he was, in his own fashion, no less than laborious; and the fashion was a good one in some cases, as in his relations with his parents and the old home circle; while in others it took too much, far too much, for granted, as he finally learned in the case of his wife. As for his honesty and courage, it would be superfluous almost to the point of impertinence to go about to prove them, so plainly do they speak through both his works

[1] Quoted by Nicol, *Thomas Carlyle*, p. 73.

and days. "I will not quit the game while faculty is given me to try playing," is the characteristically picturesque utterance of his resolve again to attack the "French Revolution" after the burning of the first volume in manuscript; and it is pleasant to remember that his consideration for the distress of his friend Mill, in whose house the disaster had occurred, was as admirable as the courage wherewith he girded himself to repair the loss.

His honesty is as plainly written on his life's work as his courage. He liked to dignify the word with a capital initial, and to proclaim as his gospel to the age his scorn and hatred of all that loved or made a lie. Whether it were possible for the finest sense of honour to dwell in the same mind with prejudices so portentous as those he harboured, I do not undertake to say; but it is indubitable that no man of genius was ever further from consenting to conceal or modify his convictions for the sake of popular favour or any material advantage which might conceivably issue from it.

Upon the whole the millions of his readers, and the other millions whose thought has been unconsciously moulded by his influence — "mostly fools" be it remembered — have dealt well with him. Mr. Froude will yet come to his own in the matter of the "Reminiscences" and the "Life." There is a sense in which just such a literary executor was needed. Carlyle was true to himself in permitting or enjoining the publications that have tried his

admirers most sorely; Mr. Froude was never more loyal to his master or to truth than when he fulfilled the behest; for Carlyle's life was too great to make a prettily consistent story. Even a little man, in so far as he is a man at all, defies our definitions and puts our formulas to shame; personality being impatient of such things. In Carlyle's case, the attempt to sum him up, label or number him, and assign him to his appropriate shelf, is as hopeless as an effort to describe the varied year in terms of any given week in it. The things said may be true; it is in point of scope and application to the whole that they are impotent.

He who would tell the truth about Carlyle must make large demands upon his vocabulary of disjunctive particles, 'but,' 'yet,' and 'though.' He did not like the Jews; yet his attitude of mind and his literary style were both Hebraistic. He could not endure Scottish Presbyterianism, except perhaps as embodied in his parents; yet in many respects he was the most eloquent and consistent Calvinist of his generation. Scarce any contemporary was so keen to discern the joints in an adversary's armour of dialectic, or so sure to pierce them; yet he was no 'logician,' and esteemed too lightly a conviction induced by close reasoning. His arsenal was doubtless well stored with syllogisms; but for aught he cared they might rot unused, while he wielded weapons — always of offence — more to his mind.

Critics and expositors have not been wanting who

have undertaken to articulate Carlyle's faith into a system and to appraise his religious influence. The task is frankly impossible, in large part for a reason which lay very close to the secret of his influence, as I shall try to indicate.

His was an intensely religious soul. He was a true son of his parents, a legitimate scion of the Calvinistic stock. Its fundamental idea, the Sovereignty of God, was ineradicably ingrained in him. There is about that idea a certain majesty, wholesomeness, and freedom from sentimentality that appealed to, and at the same time fed the deeper tastes of, his essentially wholesome nature. In keeping, too, with the Calvinistic austerity of conscience was a fierce hunger and thirst after righteousness, whereby, as Mr. Andrew Lang has finely said, his life was almost physically vexed. There is indeed no accounting for Carlyle except upon the basis of religion. This I think he would have granted emphatically, because he was always preaching it. Only when you attempted to show that it was *your* especial type or definition of religion that accounted for him, would he as indubitably have turned and rent you; for here he was an individualist almost without qualification. To his own master he and every other man stood or fell. For the religion which was wrought out of each man's experience, in so far as it was honestly inspiring and subduing, he had vast respect. Toward men's necessary attempts to formulate their experience and to organize

its results into some body like the Church, with its worship and its confession, he was critical to the point of hostility. Indeed he seems to have had little sense of the worth of corporate religion, as he had little practical sense of the problems involved in any form of corporate life or government. Despite his outcry against art in general he was a great artist; but in the fundamental art of living with his fellows he was a novice to the end.

In many respects, as has been already intimated, he stood in the succession of the Hebrew prophets. Not long after his death Professor Seeley wrote: —

"I admire as much as others this striking reappearance of the Hebrew prophet in the modern world. No mere echo or literary imitation of Hebrew prophecy, but the thing itself: the faculty of seeing moral evils which others are too drowsy to see, and of seeing them as distinctly as if they were material objects, the sublime impatience, the overwhelming denunciation . . . this is what I see in his best writings, — in 'Past and Present,' and some of the 'Latter-Day Pamphlets.'"[1]

But the likeness extended further. The vision of this latter-day seer was partial as well as vivid. To use the well-worn figure, he stood like a watcher upon some mountain-top overlooking a wide expanse of misty landscape. The valleys beneath his feet, with great stretches of the lands beyond,

[1] J. R. Seeley, "Political Somnambulism," *Macmillan's Magazine*. Cf. *Scribner's Magazine*, vol. xxii, p. 142.

were hidden; but some peaks, with here and there a larger expanse of upland, loomed clear. Upon these he fixed an intense regard; concerning them he made report with a rugged and vehement eloquence that caused the ears of two generations to tingle. He was perfectly confident of some things of utmost import; he could discern certain goals worth attainment at whatever cost, certain pitfalls and snares which it was as needful to shun; but it was beyond his power to map the way in any detail.

This does not imply that he is worthless as a guide; for the very fact of his own consciousness that so much of human fate is hid in mystery led him to declare with true Carlylean emphasis — one could say no more — a few great principles for the soul's guidance in all exigencies. Religion was a fundamental necessity to man. No soul could complete its life even here in this present world without it; since atheism is the practical denial, not of God only, but of the most significant attributes of man. The truth is always of God, and no true man will fail to accept it or fear its consequences: a lie is as inevitably of the Devil; however fitted to the moment's need its fruits promise to be, they will upon trial mock the soul's hunger like apples of Sodom. The great God Circumstance, whom the majority worship, — so far forth deserving his contemptuous "mostly fools," — is after all but a despicable deity, to be subjected to the hewing of man's wood and the drawing of his

water. Man would seem to be meant to be Captain of his Soul and Master of Fate; but even if the plan miscarry and Fate overcome him, he can at least defy mere circumstance to the end. There is a good deal of this latter teaching, by implication if not by precept, in Carlyle. He reminds us sometimes of an Indian warrior bound to the stake and conscious of inevitable doom, but solacing his pain by hurling defiance at his executioners; and characteristically enough the reminiscence is most vivid when with voluminous and eloquent verbosity he chants the worth of silence in face of Fate's blows and life's contradiction.

The inconsistency which appears here is one of his most notable characteristics, and its Hebrew type will be recalled by every reader of the Old Testament. The Hebrew prophet rarely qualified his statements. In teaching he spoke as though there were nothing more to be said upon that particular point. Much of the New Testament, too, needs to be read in the light of this principle, or it must remain a mass of exaggerated and strangely contradictory apothegms. In point of fact the contradictions of Scripture are among the most significant and necessary features of its literary style. The truth was revealed to the prophet in general outline and mass. He in turn revealed it to his hearers; yet not so much by an effort to assemble its details into a consistent whole, as by a succession of clear and sometimes startling glimpses, now from this side and now

from that, so that in the result his words often seem contradictory. They are so only as the views of a harbour or a coastline, toward which one is laboriously beating up against a head-wind, change with the different tacks. Thus the prophet sings of mercy and judgement, not qualifying one by the other, but thrusting them into a juxtaposition which at first sight seems hopelessly unnatural. The Sermon on the Mount, when set side by side with the other teachings of Christ, needs to be interpreted in the light of this fact. Christ was a stranger to theological dialectic. There is no single discourse of His which bears the mark of careful and laboured logical arrangement. On the other hand, after the true Eastern fashion, He abounds and seems to delight in extreme statements and injunctions almost impossible of fulfilment; nor does He hesitate to contradict Himself at times. The attempts to soften Scripture phraseology are really attempts to emasculate it. Ruggedness, strenuousness, and a sort of exaggeration, are of its essence. We are to take no thought for the morrow, — one half regrets its qualification into "anxious thought,"—but on the other hand we are expected to discern the signs of the times and lay our plans to profit by them. We are to "hate" father and mother if need be for the Gospel's sake; but it is no less true that the man who makes religion an excuse for slackness in filial duty or respect is a hypocrite of hypocrites. The man smitten upon one cheek is exhorted to turn the other also; but no less

strenuously exhorted to sell his cloak if need be and buy a sword. The twistings and turnings of commentator and apologist in their fruitless endeavours to harmonize these contradictory passages would be amusing if they did not threaten the deeper integrity of Scripture. The Gospel is not a body of injunctions laid upon men with a view to the predetermination of conduct in every possible exigency of life. It is rather an introduction to the Spirit Who is meant to inhabit and inspire a man in such degree as to insure his development along right lines, and make him, under all circumstances, equal to life's demands. Hence the general religious sense of men has been right in insisting upon the supremacy of the Law of Love to God and fellow-man, and equally right in refusing to permit the exaltation of any isolated utterance into an instrument of tyranny.

No word of this apparent digression has been written with a view to suggesting a comparison between Carlyle's message and that of the Gospels. Yet it is true that his approach to his readers is after the Scripture manner. He, "like Ruskin, keeps himself right not by caveats, but by contradictions of himself, and sometimes in a way least to be expected."[1] It was never his lot "to see life steadily and see it whole." He saw life fitfully, and saw its *disjecta membra* rather; but his vision was amazingly vivid, and he was haunted by a

[1] Nicol, *Thomas Carlyle*, p. 215.

sense that these fragments were meant to go together if only one might discover the secret of integrity. That, if it were ever revealed to him, he never taught in its fulness; though he did teach with almost unexampled cogency and power certain essential factors in its formula.

It is here that the distinctive difference between his teaching and that of Scripture lies. The latter, beneath its surface contradictions, rests upon a fundamental principle of unity, which comes to the surface in Christ and visualizes itself for all time and all men. Carlyle grasped the Old Testament elements of this and strove to exploit them, in season and out of season, for the benefit of a day which sorely needed exactly that message. His century was just awakening to a sense of its opportunity and the promise of its material advance. It was prone to prophesy smooth things to itself when Carlyle's eloquent discord smote upon its ear: "I do not want cheaper cotton; swifter railways; I want what Novalis calls 'God, Freedom, and Immortality.' Will swift railways and sacrifices to Hudson[1] help me toward that?" One does not wonder that he impressed Emerson with his possession of "The strong religious tinge you sometimes find in burly people. That, and all his qualities,

[1] Hudson's once famous name has passed into such oblivion that the reader, especially the American reader, may need to be reminded that he was the railway 'promoter' *par excellence* of Carlyle's day.

have a certain virulence, coupled though it be in his case with the utmost impatience of Christendom and Jewdom and all existing presentments of the good old story."[1] With this general judgement such different men as Chalmers and Newman substantially agree. The former was quick to recognize Carlyle's fundamentally religious nature and his considerable religious influence; but his mature verdict was "He is a lover of earnestness rather than a lover of truth." Newman wrote to his sister in 1839, "The writer [*i. e.* Carlyle] has not very clear principles and views, but they are very deep," a criticism as characteristic of Newman as it was true of Carlyle.

In view of the rugged and fragmentary nature of his teaching, its frequent note of denial and scorn, his utter inability to map out a coherent and practicable scheme for the conduct of individual or social life, and his almost unintermittent wail of weariness and self-pity, as though life were an agony without significant "why" or "wherefore," one is tempted to repeat Carlyle's own question about John Sterling: "Why has a Biography been inflicted on this man; why has not No-biography and the privilege of the weary been his lot?"[2] The answer is that there is something titanic and Dantesque about his spiritual experience. Its fragmentary character enhances its vivid-

[1] "Impressions of Thomas Carlyle," *Scribner's Magazine*, 1881.
[2] *Life of Sterling*, p. 5.

ness. There is a sense in which the testimony of a man who antagonized and scorned the prim orthodoxies of his day so vehemently is worth more to religion than the well-considered witness of many saints. His immediate debt to religion was very great. Notable as was his capacity for scorn, there were depths of reverence in him, and the picture which he has himself drawn of a visit to the Ecclefechan cottage late one evening, and his waiting at the door in quiet, almost prayerful gratitude, because he heard his father's voice within "making worship," is as fine in its way as "The Cottar's Saturday Night." Carlyle, like Burns, discerned the hidings of Scotland's power. Though far less dependent than his great disciple, Ruskin, upon the language of religion and its oracles for rhetorical effect, he none the less drew largely upon the recognized forms of religious experience and expression in the voicing of his message. The story of the conversion in Leith Walk, which of itself must have sufficed to make "Sartor" memorable, might unquestionably have been differently phrased; but the fact that it was told under the forms of religion heightened its significance because it revealed its deeper truth. To call it a "conversion" was no mere convention of speech; a fact which Carlyle realized far better than some of his more orthodox critics; for the essence of religious conversion is a yielding of the life to the guidance and companionship of the Spirit of Truth

— the Divine resident in the world of nature and in the heart of man so far as man will admit Him. In a very real sense the deeper integrity of Carlyle's life and influence hinges upon the revelation made to him that day and his allegiance to its import and its Author. It is beside the mark to say that he did not always sound the note of this new message clear and strong; few human servants fail to be occasionally unprofitable, and few human instruments always keep in tune. The struggle for the "Everlasting Yea" was not immediately successful; indeed, like the battle of the prophet's vision, it was sometimes with confused noise and garments rolled in blood; yet, the idea of it never passed into permanent eclipse. The seer chose to write his message in many different and seemingly contradictory forms, — one is tempted to say that Carlyle liked to give his very blessing *sub specie damnationis*, — but soon or late he always struck a positive note.

I have said that an attempt to systematize this message would appear to be an almost gratuitous impertinence, inasmuch as it never revealed itself to the messenger himself in systematic form; yet a writer in the "St. James's Gazette" soon after Carlyle's death presented the main points in it at once so fairly and so clearly, that I venture to quote a part of his summary.

"He also thought that the truths which Calvinism tried to express, and succeeded in expressing

in an imperfect or partially mistaken manner, were the ultimate governing principles of morals and politics, of whose systematic neglect in this age nothing but evil could come. . . . What then was his creed? . . . First, he believed in God; secondly, he believed in an absolute opposition between good and evil; thirdly, he believed that all men do, in fact, take sides more or less decisively in this great struggle, and ultimately turn out to be either good or bad; fourthly, he believed that good is stronger than evil, and by infinitely slow degrees gets the better of it, but that this process is so slow as to be continually obscured and thrown back by evil influences of various kinds — one of which he believed to be specially powerful in the present day. . . . The great fact about each particular man is the relation, whether of friendship or enmity, in which he stands to God. . . . All (*i. e.* good and bad men) pass alike through this mysterious hall of doom called life; most show themselves in their true colours under pressure. . . . Let us bring out as far as may be possible such good as man has had in him since his origin. Let us strike down the bad to the hell that gapes for him. This, we think, or something like this, was Mr. Carlyle's translation of election and predestination into politics and morals. . . . There is not much pity and no salvation worth speaking of in either body of doctrine; but there is a strange, and what some might regard as a terrible, parallelism between these doctrines and the inferences that may be drawn from physical science. The survival of the fittest has much in common with the doctrine of election, and philosophical necessity, as summed up in what we now

call evolution, comes practically to much the same result as predestination." [1]

Whether the reader accept this interpretation of Carlyle's message or not, none can deny the inspiration which it brought to great numbers of thoughtful young men who were to become the leaders of the two generations which passed across the stage between the date of "Sartor Resartus" and the end of the century. At first sight it seems strange that a message which was so often wrapt in the forms of doubt and denial should have proved so generally positive. Its positive essence lay in Carlyle's glorification of Duty; in his emphasis upon work as a necessity to the completion of man's physical and moral stature; and perhaps most of all in his unshaken belief that men themselves, as Professor Wallace has said, "are but earthly vestures of spiritual forces." This proved a truth of fundamental import to a day which was in danger of measuring all things by material standards, and of denying reality itself to everything that was not susceptible of expression in the formulas of physics, mechanics, or chemistry. On the other hand, a considerable portion of Carlyle's negative deliverances were due to his ingrained and essential non-conformity.[2] He was by nature an eminently otherwise-minded man,

[1] This article may be found at greater length in the appendix to Prof. John Nicol's admirable *Thomas Carlyle* of the English Men of Letters Series, pp. 255–257.

[2] Prof. Nicol, *Thomas Carlyle*, p. 71.

a radical, set against the prevalent Toryism of his youth, who changed to a worshipper of wilful force at almost equal variance with the democracy of his old age. This type of character is quickly discerned, and its whimsies pretty generally discounted, by a patient world, used to a good deal of chaff with its wheat, and indisposed to murmur if only the wheat be of pronounced and unmistakable quality. Carlyle's extravagances misled few of his disciples into anything worse than a temporary imitation of his style. His genuine love of truth, his emphasis upon the vital relation of work to manhood, his idea of history as a vision of judgement, and his insatiable longing for "God, Freedom, Immortality" strengthened the faith of multitudes. He exerted a deep and lasting influence upon the religious thought of his day; and remains an outstanding witness to the eagerness with which men listen to the voice of genuine authority when it speaks upon the deepest themes.

I should be quite unwilling to attempt any elaborate justification of the title of this chapter. Professor Henry Jones has suggested in his recent essays upon the "Working Faith of a Social Reformer," [1] that we are in great danger of being led astray in debate upon sociological matters by our use of physical similes and figures. The attempt to reach definitions by way of metaphors is no less

[1] *Hibbert Journal*, vol. iv.

dangerous throughout the whole realm of personal relations, as we shall find renewed occasion to note when we approach the Great Twin Brethren of the century's poetry, Tennyson and Browning. The reader is not to suppose, therefore, that any elaborate likeness is to be traced here between the pre-exilic prophets whose names introduce the chapter and the masters of Victorian prose whose experience and influence make up its substance.

Yet the Tishbite elements in Carlyle are very plain to see. His rude but devout uprearing, his training in the desert of poverty and doubt, his impatience with the conventional forms of life and speech, his almost brutal force of utterance and contempt of compromise, fitted him in rare degree to be the spokesman of a certain type of truth to an age that seemed bent upon the service of false gods. The breath of his nostrils was denunciatory, and, like all mastery of the dangerous art of cursing, it reacted upon him, plunging him at times into such depths of gloom that his most characteristic seat seems to many to be the throne of despair beneath the juniper. The oft repeated "Ay de mi" was simply his translation into less dignified terms of the old "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."

A large, if not a double, portion of this spirit fell upon his great disciple, who yet seemed to the world to be a sunnier and more gracious character.

To say that Ruskin was more conventional than Carlyle would be to over-shoot the mark; since in many ways he bade defiance all his life long to some of society's most cherished bye-laws. But he was gently reared; tenderly sheltered from rude circumstance; led up to his life's work by pleasant paths, and the heir to a goodly material heritage. There was a touch of natural grimness in the elder prophet which accorded well with the raiment of camel's hair, the leathern girdle, and the desert cry of the Elijah-John Baptist tradition; though he was in point of fact a more habitual frequenter of great houses and aristocratic company than Ruskin ever became; but, through his talk even there, we discern the northern *burr* and the rude strength of a hard-headed peasant's speech.

The pupil and interpreter, who popularized much of his doctrine that might otherwise never have gained the world's ear, was as pronouncedly middle-class in origin. Yet, precisely as the peasant family of Ecclefechan showed a degree of industrial, ethical, and spiritual cultivation which marked them among other households of their neighbourhood, so the rich sherry-importer of Billiter Street, and his wife ruling her household at Herne Hill, are to be explicitly distinguished from the ordinary Philistine type of middle-class family. The elder Ruskin was a man of considerable natural refinement, distinct, though by no means exceptional, artistic gifts, and good education. Mrs. Ruskin represented the best

type of British matron, cast in a rather large and placid mould, — the very personification of good sense, firm household authority, and devout religious conviction. If under these circumstances their son fell heir to Carlyle's mission, it was at least with some of the differences which gentler nurture, ample opportunities for travel, a keen though wilful aesthetic sense, and the experience of a gentleman commoner of Christ Church naturally tended to produce. The later prophet might well seem therefore to be the more gracious in the general tenor of his message; yet like Elisha he was subject to gusts of wintry anger, under the stress of which he could curse those who dared to mock him with all his master's unction.

In the case of both, religion may be said to have entered into the very substance of their pre-natal life. Like Hannah of old, Ruskin's mother dedicated her son to the service of religion by anticipation; and both parents long cherished the hope that he would take orders — and incidentally office — in the Church of England. As a child Ruskin seems to have looked upon this as a sufficiently natural and welcome prospect. He has himself told the story of a childish sermon in the drawing room at home whose burden was, "People, be good." Unexceptionable doctrine, to be sure, and worthy of all acceptation, though the picture of the religiously precocious child is a little painful, and the taste which could give such priggishness permanence is

characteristically dubious. Yet it would be the greatest of mistakes to suppose that Ruskin's pronouncedly religious home training was mawkish or sentimental. The evangelical faith of his parents, especially of his mother, had far too much twist in its fibre to tolerate flabbiness or sentimentality. The boy was taught his Bible as many a contemporary was taught his Latin grammar, *verbatim et literatim*, with less regard to his immediate ability to grasp its significance than to his future acquaintance with the text in a day when wider experience of life might clothe manner and matter both with meaning. So his mother, careful to the verge of prudishness though she seemed in some things, took him squarely through both Testaments, exercising a wise choice as to the chapters to be memorized, but blinking not a syllable, as it would seem, of the less lovely or profitable portions of the narratives. Hard names and doubtful actions were all manfully read out, until the whole book became wellnigh as familiar as a household word.

His own testimony to the worth of this experience is memorable.

"Her unquestioning evangelical faith in the literal truth of the Bible placed me, as soon as I could conceive or think, in the presence of an unseen world; and set my active analytic power early to work on the questions of conscience, free-will, and responsibility, which are easily determined in days of innocence; but are approached too often

with prejudice, and always with disadvantage, after men become stupefied by the opinions, or tainted by the sins, of the outer world: while the gloom and even terror with which the restrictions of the Sunday, and the doctrines of the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' the 'Holy War,' and Quarles's 'Emblems' oppressed the seventh part of my time, was useful to me as the only form of vexation which I was called on to endure; and redeemed by the otherwise uninterrupted cheerfulness and tranquillity of a household wherein the common ways were all of pleasantness, and its single and strait path, of perfect peace." [1]

Both Carlyle and Ruskin must have become eminent among their fellows under almost any conceivable circumstances of training. It seems safe to aver, however, that neither would have developed the great literary and ethical power that each finally exerted without this early familiarity with Scripture thought and language. We may go further and ascribe no small portion of their influence to the evangelical faith in which both were reared and something of whose essence remained with them, even in their most heterodox days. One of the essential features of evangelical Protestantism has been its insistence upon the value of a faith which should be at once positive, individual, strenuous, and uncompromisingly confessed. Frequently enough this has bred dogmatic and unlovely characters; but it has rarely failed to produce effective men. Of all

[1] *Præterita*, vol. i, chap. 7.

its children none had a clearer claim to legitimacy than Carlyle and Ruskin. Both disappointed their parents by failing to enter the formal ministry of the Church; though Carlyle, as a student of divinity, once pronounced a sermon in college, and Ruskin, as has been said, exercised his infant gifts in the nursery. Yet both came to be known as preachers to a greater audience than their mothers' wildest dreams had pictured for them. Both kept a great deal of the manner and much of the essence of the religious faith in which they had been trained. The most popular works of both breathed an ardent Protestantism; and both, Carlyle certainly, seem to have retained an evangelical distaste for the confessed Unitarians;[1] though they themselves might be adjudged to be Unitarians by a stickler for theological definition.

The religious burden of both was the old evangelical watchword, "By faith ye are saved"; and no less strenuously did they voice its complement, "Faith without works is dead." Both were eminently non-conformist in a general rather than a sectarian sense, in so far as they discovered the seat of religion in the personal relation of the individual to God and to his fellows, rather than in any tradition or institution. Both remained rela-

[1] The reader will recall the letter in which Carlyle confesses to Emerson the fact that he was the only Unitarian whom he could thoroughly like; while his dislike of Strauss and Renan was sincere and pronounced. Nicol, *Thomas Carlyle*, p. 225.

tively indifferent to the organized Church with her worship, sacraments, system of instruction, and social helpfulness; yet this was at least partly because of their recognition of the scope and range of personality. "The earthly vesture of spiritual forces"; such was the definition of man which underlay Ruskin's thought, as it has already been shown to have animated Carlyle's. The latter illustrated it in the realms of history, politics, and philosophy. Ruskin carried it on into the criticism of art, which in his hands became of necessity the criticism of life; and into a romantic assault upon the current political economy. Utterly quixotic as this last adventure must have seemed to the England of Cobden and the Manchester School; dangerous as the orthodox economists may have thought it, in spite of its quixotism, so eloquent was the form of its strange gospel; vague and chimerical as many of its specific recommendations undoubtedly were; the last half-century has gone far to justify Ruskin's entrance upon this field. Paladin born out of due time as he was, and all too ready to set his lance in rest against sheep and windmills, he yet won his way to a place of unquestioned eminence among the leaders of his century because of his insistence upon the relationship between art and life, political economy and ethics, the common weal and the welfare of each individual worker. Like his great contemporary, Lord Shaftesbury, he employed a definition of manhood

which included and took account of the downmost man. That both framed some of their definitions rather blunderingly is not to the point. The office of the preacher is often less to tell his hearers what to do, than to arouse them to the necessity of doing something, and to the inquiry what it shall be. When society at large puts this question men are so constituted in their likeness and relation to God that an answer is never long delayed.

Ruskin's preaching was of precisely this convicting and arousing sort: grotesque, exaggerated, emotional, oftentimes beyond what was seemly, like much evangelistic arraignment and exhortation; but wonderfully fitted to its purpose of shattering prosperous self-complacency, waking a sluggish social conscience, and inciting a hunger and thirst after truer economic righteousness. It has been commonly taken for granted that his doctrine lacked continuity and system; and the extraordinary nimbleness of his wit, together with an analytic faculty as overworked as it was over-developed, has seemed to justify the belief. He was forever turning aside at the appeal of a new interest, illuminated as it always was by his sanguine imagination. Thus the third and fourth volumes of "Modern Painters" were so long postponed to the "Seven Lamps of Architecture," the "Stones of Venice," and the "Lectures on Architecture and Painting," that the work as a whole is thrown out of joint by the ten-year interval; while the further

delay of four years before the final volumes appeared, together with the diversion of Ruskin's interest in the meantime to political economy, served to heighten the sense of incongruity. Indeed the casual reader is tempted to say that most of his pilgrimage was a more or less enthusiastic flitting to and fro in Bye-path Meadow.

Yet the student who has learned Ruskin's language and caught a glimpse of the manner in which his heart, mind, and will coördinated their activities, will not be deceived. Bye-path Meadow unquestionably had its pleasant way with him at times, and led him into its characteristic difficulties. But it never succeeded in changing the general direction of his march, interrupting the continuity of his humane interests, or making him forget the guiding principles of his faith.

With the doctrine of Personality, or of the place and power of the Person, so forcefully, though often so perversely expounded by Carlyle in his "Heroes and Hero-Worship," "Cromwell," and "Frederick," Ruskin found himself in hearty accord. But he approached it at a different angle and emphasized a different aspect of it. Carlyle's interest centred in the Leader, or King, of men; centred so completely there, indeed, as to confound his etymological instinct and lead him to worse than dubious sources for the derivation of some of his words. Ruskin was quite as devout a worshipper of order, though a less subservient admirer of force.

He proclaimed his Toryism from the housetops. But 'in the last analysis' (as the current phrase goes), his interest in the social order centred in the Person as a worker and therefore a creator, whether poet or artisan. The famous chapter on the "Nature of Gothic" in Volume II of the "Stones of Venice," with its memorable emphasis upon the worth of a right attitude on the part of the worker toward his work, sets this forth. The strain recurs in Volume III of "Modern Painters," where greatness of style, and false and true ideals, are discussed quite as really from the standpoint of the religious and ethical teacher as from that of the art critic.

Indeed the third chapter of this volume might with perfect fitness be incorporated into the course in homiletics in any school of the prophets. Ruskin makes true greatness of style in art — and the application is general to all artistic composition, whether in word, line, or colour — to consist in the first place in the choice of noble subjects; that is in the habitual selection "of subjects which involve wide interests and profound passions, as opposed to those which involve narrow interests and slight passions." Two pitfalls lurk, however, in the path of him who would develop a noble subject — both dug by vanity. He will be tempted on the one hand to supersede expression by an attempt at technical excellence which will lead him, if he be a preacher, let us say, into the reading of admirably

finished but painfully inefficient essays; or in his zeal for effective expression he may on the other do such despite to the technique of his art as to smother his theme and nauseate his hearers by a flood of unregulated and sentimental passion. In the second place, this art consists in a love of beauty, which must, however, be true in its purpose to represent things as they are, never arbitrarily omitting the ugly, but keeping it in subjection to the pure and lovely. "Great art dwells on all that is beautiful; but false art omits or changes all that is ugly." The third essential to him who would be a great artist is sincerity; an essential so obvious, whatever the medium of the art may be, as to make comment needless. Not only, however, must the choice of noble themes be sincere, but since all truth cannot be presented, so varied and multifarious is it, the artist must be honest in his choice between what can be taken and what must be left. "The inferior artist chooses unimportant and scattered truths; the great artist chooses the most necessary first and afterwards the most consistent with these, so as to obtain the greatest possible and most harmonious *sum*." Finally, great art must always be inventive, and like poetry in this respect, that it is never content with bald narrative, or a mere copy of external nature, or a didactic utterance of the truth, to be accepted or rejected at the onlooker's whim; all its material is made the artist's own, passes into the alembic of his personal-

ity, and after being transfused by his imagination, reappears in living forms calculated to arouse true emotion and to compel acceptance. Thus in a picture the painted forms are transfigured into men and women of like passions with ourselves; and no less in a sermon, the truth which seemed external and remote yesterday, to-day searches the heart, compels the will, and is transformed into goodness.

I have cited this chapter simply to indicate how applicable Ruskin's criticism of art is to the guidance of the writer, teacher, or preacher; the fact being that he recognizes the fundamental identity of principle underlying all worthy human activities, uniting them to one another, and joining all to the creative processes of God.

This constitutes the principle of unity and coherence which runs through all his work. The work itself often seems fragmentary; the active mind was so capable of vagaries and the ebullient imagination was so liable to fly off for the time at new tangents; yet the man himself remained true to his central doctrines of the worth of the Person; of the absolute necessity of the worker's identification of self with his work before that work could become true; as well as the equal necessity under which society rested of respecting this Person, whether king or peasant, and assuring to him his full share of privilege, before the chief human art —that of living together—could ever be developed

to its full capacity. I have already shown how this doctrine is suggested in the "Stones of Venice" and the mid-volumes of "Modern Painters." Before he was thirty, he tells us in "Præterita,"[1] the problem of the Andalusian peasantry, whose labours produced the sherry so necessary and profitable to his father's business, and the nearer puzzle presented by the contrast between his own fortunate lot and that of his cousins in Perth and Croydon, had become matters first of interest and then of concern to him. Under the influence of the great question thus presented, the joyous and romantic grace of his earlier writings lost something of its bloom; but the prophetic note deepened until Ruskin's voice became, if not the most authoritative, at least one of the most haunting and convicting of his day. The message which he uttered in "Unto this Last," and "Munera Pulveris" was like a reiteration of the prophecy of Amos done into latter-day English. The former began its appearance in the "Cornhill" Magazine, under Thackeray's editorship, in 1860; but the outcry against it was so general that the publication was discontinued. Almost precisely the same fate befell the latter, which "Fraser's," then edited by Froude, began to print in 1862, but was forced to discontinue in like manner.

It was at this juncture that he seems unreservedly to have assumed the prophet's mantle and

[1] Vol. ii, chap. 9.

resigned himself to the prophet's fate. As Mr. Mackail has put it: "Now the task before him was to break down his own popularity, to be regarded by the world with a mixture of pity and contempt, to see even his friends fail him and fall away from him." It was hard for the reading public of the early sixties to see any natural bond of continuity relating the political and religious heresy of the economist to the highly improving eloquence of the evangelical champion of Turner. Time was needed before his central doctrine of the preëminence of the Person should be clearly discerned by the public and bring to light such harmony as really existed between Ruskin's earlier and later work. Meanwhile it must be remembered that it was but imperfectly discerned by the prophet himself. Both Ruskin and Carlyle caught glimpses of it which were vivid and compelling enough to give direction and distinction to their work; but neither enjoyed the clear and constant vision. Both believed in God; but to the end both seemed to think of the Divine Power and Presence as manifested by interference with the natural order rather than as resident in it and working through it. So much of the truth as Ruskin saw, inspired —and teased him. Hence it happened that —

"Stimulating and fascinating beyond all writers of his generation in detached utterances, he was less like a builder than a sower scattering seed to right and left with careless hand. Some of his seed

fell on the wayside, some among thorns, much in shallow soil. What fell on good ground has profoundly influenced the movement of the world for the last half-century."

Again the words are Mr. Mackail's, and upon the whole we may give hearty assent to them.

Ruskin's strength and weakness have both contributed in their several degrees to confirm his hold upon the last two generations. He has always the manner of a sincere man, — sincere no less in his prejudices and whims than in his great convictions. There is a frankness about his very irritability that is engaging, as when for instance he confesses that on one occasion, as he approached the Alps, the long-expected rapture of his first glimpse of their snows was spoiled by the fact that at the last halting-place his man had neglected to provide butter for the bread. The facts are set down with a whimsical enjoyment of their incongruity, which the reader shares. Perfectly temperate and even abstemious though he was, he repeatedly makes epistolary capital of the temptations lying in wait for a traveller's appetite. The following passage from a rhymed letter to Mrs. Severn illustrates this, and shows at the same time his extraordinary facility in verse-making. The reader may need to be reminded that his father's crest was a boar's head, and that Ruskin, who had grave doubts about the validity of the family coat-of-arms, used sometimes to refer to himself on dyspeptic occasions as "little pigs."

If little pigs — when evening dapples,
With fading clouds, her autumn sky —
Set out in search of Norman chapels,
And find, instead, where cliffs are high,
Half way from Amiens to Etaples,
A castle, full of pears and apples,
On donjon floors laid out to dry, —
Green jargonelles and apples tenny, —
And finds their price is five a penny,
If little pigs then buy too many,
Spare to those little pigs a sigh. [1]

It is odd that his sense of humour, which was so keen and wholesome, should not oftener have come to his aid when tempted, as he frequently was, to jump from uncertain premisses to dogmatic conclusions. There was a mischievous little boy upon Wallingford Bridge whose intentness of regard, fastened as it seemed to be upon the parapet, convinced the passing Ruskin that here was a young naturalist whose interest in stone or insect gave token of a better day for British youth. Suddenly the child darted across the roadway and assumed the same attitude of intense watchfulness upon the other side — when it became evident that his purpose was, not merely to spit upon a laden pleasure-boat passing beneath, but with impish zeal to spit upon it twice. The disillusionment was complete enough to have

[1] *Præterita*, vol. ii, chap. 8, p. 294. Even more succinct is the apothegm: —

When little pigs have muffins hot
And take three quarters for their lot,
Then little pigs — had better not.

justified an inward chuckle even while it necessitated an outward rebuke. But to Ruskin it seemed to break the seal of a prophetic scroll upon which was written the doom of a people whose youth were thus lost to all sense of gentleness and reverence. "Dear but peppery Mr. Ruskin," began some unknown correspondent one morning, when the letters were brought in at Brantwood. It was impertinent, as unknown correspondents are wont to be, but it summed up succinctly the judgement of his day — especially its feminine judgement — upon a teacher who could be equally zealous in great and little matters, but who was always true-hearted, pitiful, and devout. He has proved to be one of the most effective preachers of his generation; singularly indebted to religion for the character of his parents, for his training at home, and for his command of a highly ornate but still honestly eloquent style, formed as it was, partly with set purpose upon that of the judicious Hooker, and yet more largely and naturally upon the Bible and the language of devotion which has sprung from it. It is under the forms of religion that we most naturally describe his experience of acceptance, rejection and re-acceptance as a prophet. And it is to terms of essential Christianity that we must have recourse in order to express the abiding elements in his message.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MASTERS OF FICTION. I

The title of this chapter suggests one of the most difficult questions which I shall have to face. It is comparatively easy to appraise the significance of religion to the man who boldly writes about it, even when, as often happens, we are forced to go behind his words. The poet, for instance, whose art compels him, unless he be a very minor poet indeed, to scale the heights of aspiration and to sound the depths of experience, usually states the case with relative plainness even when its problems are not easy of solution. The modern novelist of the 'psychological' school, whose too often meagre and exiguous, even though painfully elaborated, art occupies itself with some acute crisis in life's fever, is given to such definite pronouncement upon religion as to obviate the danger of serious mistake concerning his view of it or its influence upon him. But the great names in nineteenth-century fiction, until we reach that of George Eliot, decline to be thus explicit. What religion meant to them, what they meant by it, and what place they assigned to it in the life which their novels portrayed, are questions whose answers must be distilled rather

than extracted bodily from their work. This necessity lays the writer upon such a theme as mine open both to temptation and to misunderstanding. The temptation is to express by violence from their writings opinions which he has himself introduced by subtilty; while even if he be wholly honest in his plan of treatment, those whose prejudices are enlisted for or against a given author may, upon that very ground, accuse him of indifference or partiality.

Hence it becomes necessary at this juncture to remind the reader of the religious significance implied in the very form of the novel. The novel is a picture of life. Unlike history, which — at least until recently — concerned itself primarily with annals and the ascertainment of events recognized to be passed and gone, the novel pictures life in progress, with its expectations, passions, and ideals. History deals with communities, or with leaders of men in their representative capacities. The novel puts us in touch with individuals, and, if it be a great novel, reveals 'characters' — which is but another way of saying that it introduces us to the soul as an ultimate subject of experience. In the Introduction I undertook to show that all experiences of the soul are germane to religion. They are not less significant to the writer of genuinely human tales. The novelist deals with the souls of men under the aspect of their earthly pilgrimage of three-score years and ten. Religion regards

them *sub specie æternitatis*. It follows that the range of fiction is legitimately wider than that of any critical school or sect. Nothing could well be more parochial than the claims of the so-called 'realists' to a monopoly of the art. The genuinely catholic critic will rejoice in Jane Austen's "two inches square of ivory"; but at the same time he will remember that not all painting can be done in miniature, and that a microscope is by no means an adequate instrument for observation of the sun. In the development of life the adventures of the imagination play as real a part as love and hunger; the thing striven for and missed may conceivably enter more largely into experience than the thing attained.

> What I aspired to be,
> And was not, comforts me.

The romantic element, which feeds gratefully upon the adventures of others and aspires to adventures of its own, is fundamental; and the 'realist' who ignores or cavils at it does so at grievous peril to his own artistic integrity.

It follows further that, just as every field of real life has treasure in it for the student of religion, and sometimes the treasure under barren surfaces proves richest, so all honest fiction — by which I mean every sincere attempt to portray life, whether commonplace or extraordinary, as distinguished from that writing which aims at mere sensational effect — bears its message to him; and

again, the message that seems to concern itself least explicitly with religion is frequently of more religious significance than the word of the man who is always crying, "Lord! Lord!"

One thing more needs to be clearly understood in this connection. By a general consensus of uncritical opinion it seems to have been taken for granted that, while tragedy may be allowed some legitimate claim to a place in the temple of faith, comedy, if not assigned to the outer darkness, can only stand humbly in a distant court of the Gentiles. Pathos is supposed to be naturally pious; humour is thought to be of the world and must be converted. At the risk of seeming dogmatic, I steadfastly maintain that no heresy ever better deserved bell, book, and candle. For consider how deep into the heart of unbelief it inveigles the unwary. Grant its premisses and atheism is assured.

Humour I take to be a quick sense of life's lesser incongruities. They appear in every phase of experience, — in the soul's aspiration and the fancy's dream, as well as in the day's work. The practical joker, who is rarely a person of genuine humour, being just able to discern the fact that humour and incongruity are related, goes about to drag in his 'accidents' with cart-ropes, or lays traps to catch mirth unawares. He fails because his artificial mishaps are gross and cruel. Smiles are too wary to be caught with guile, though now and then a lumbering and small-witted laugh may be trapped. Purpose-

ful indignities cannot from their very nature be genuinely humourous, though the casually undignified may be funny enough in a rather poor and temporary way.

True humour, then, — whereby I mean that which not only tickles the fancy's palate to quiet mirth, but also leaves so sweet a taste as to make rumination pleasant, — must depend for its wholesomeness upon faith. A mischance or contradiction, to seem funny, must of necessity be casual; the moment that it threatens to become normal or permanent, mirth changes to a seriousness of more than common gravity. The sudden eclipse of recently installed electric lights in a public building, just as a speaker had completed a period in which their wonder and convenience was set forth, emphasized as it all was by the dim progress of a solitary lamp toward the platform in order that the meeting might proceed, had its distinctly humourous side which the audience appreciated. But their real enjoyment depended upon confidence that the interruption was temporary; that the system was fairly and adequately installed; and that it would go on to do its work again after a little. Had the mishap signified a permanent cessation of service, a dishonest or careless installation of apparatus, or even a foolish trick, the humour of the thing must have been correspondingly diminished until it vanished or gave place to concern and indignation. It is true that the honestly mirthful man, whose appreciation of life's lesser incongruities gives

variety to his experience and lightness to his touch, is not infrequently subject to attacks of depression and gloom. His faith is equal to the lesser contradictions; but the keen sense of the unexpected which merely serves as sauce to his usual equanimity, reveals no less the great and baffling problems of life with a clearness which sometimes throws faith into temporary shadow. Then, when for the moment he doubts the integrity of the general scheme of things, not only is laughter stricken dumb, but — what can far less be spared — the quiet smile of a soul at peace with God and man fades out, and, for at least a little, a horror of great darkness threatens. Without faith a man may conceivably be a wit; he may, if he have great intellectual endowments, become a master of satire; but honest humour grows best in the soil of faith, hope, and love. Mr. Shorthouse once elaborated the thesis that it is of the nature and family of pathos.[1] He pushed his claim too far; but it is and must always be true that the heart most keenly alive to the humour in this oddly compounded life of ours will never be blind or indifferent to the tears of things.

Of course humour is a comprehensive term, and not all humourous minds are equally catholic. The enjoyment of farce depends so much upon temperament that now and then a man who is quickly responsive to those rays in the spectrum of humour

[1] In *Macmillan's Magazine*, vol. xlvii, p. 363. Cf. R. H. Hutton, *Brief Literary Criticisms*, p. 69.

which reach up toward the actinic violet of wit is relatively insensitive to the broader effects in the region of red; and it is always to be remembered that, just as humour may on the one hand vanish as wit develops into malevolent satire, so upon the other it may degenerate through farce into mere *grotesquerie*, in which, as Ruskin once showed, there is always at least a suggestion of something evil; very much as pathos may harden on this side into bitterness and cynicism, or degenerate upon that into flabby and mawkish sentimentality. Within his limits, however, — and they are very wide ones, — the true humourist strengthens our confidence in a rational world by showing the incongruities of experience for what they are — ripples upon the surface of life's tide. In so far as he helps us to see that these things lend variety and facility to the art of living, and that even when the ripples grow to billows of threatening size and aspect they are powerless to thwart a man's progress so long as he is true to himself and to what he believes to be the divine purpose in his life, the humourist ministers to faith and becomes an ally of religion.

The two women who, late in the eighteenth century and early in the nineteenth, broke away from the blood-and-mystery type of novel which Mrs. Radcliffe and Monk Lewis had popularized, will serve to illustrate my point. Miss Edgeworth is, I suppose, little read to-day; but Jane Austen's popularity has waxed rather than waned in the last score of years;

indeed, her charm seems to have given good proof of its perennial quality. Though significant figures, they must not detain us long. Both are eminently genial in their outlook upon life. Both proceed upon the basis of an assured faith in God above, and in the worth of truth, chastity, and honour among men below. It is into such a soil as this that the roots of their humour thrust themselves and are strongly nourished. If my memory serve me aright, John Foster once wrote an essay whose burden was that Maria Edgeworth's novels were practically irreligious, because worldly, books; and it is not to be denied that their author found herself very much at home for more than four-score years in this Valley of Achor. It is equally undeniable, however, that she managed to find place and time in her pilgrimage for the cultivation of some graces of the Spirit, which even John Foster might have envied.

"God made man upright," saith the Scripture, and Richard Lovell Edgeworth we may hope was no violent exception to the rule; but scarce any man of his generation sought out more inventions — literal inventions, like telegraphs, velocipedes, and pedometers, or tropical, like the four wives and nineteen children who eventually made up his family. The novelist's place was among the eldest of this horde, and one of her claims to grateful remembrance is that she had gifts and virtues sufficient to enable her to be a dutiful and loving daughter to her father, the affectionate friend and companion of her three

stepmothers, and a devoted teacher of their successive broods. Unquestionably the situation at Edgeworthtown might readily have lent itself to the 'problem' novelist's purposes. Here were all the elements of irritation, passion, and sordid tragedy; the eccentric and wilful father, the unfailing procession of wives, the jungle of olive-branches; and among them the gifted daughter with her ambitions, her impulse toward literary expression, her one great personal romance — and her burden of daily cares. What wonder if she had broken with it all, or remained only to beat her life out against the bars of her prison-house! But Maria Edgeworth either lacked some of the qualities which distinguish the modern heroine, or else possessed gifts denied to that strenuous person. She did not strive or cry; but went about her multifarious tasks with a cheerful equanimity the tonic influence of which has not yet evaporated; went about them, too, with eyes wide open to features of Irish life which others may have seen, but of which none, until her time, had found means to tell. She never forgot M. Edelcrantz, the faithful Swede who would have married her could she have been brought to leave Ireland and her father's house; nor did she show signs of much self-pity on the score of blighted affection, though she could never hear any sudden reference to him or his people without emotion; but from the time when, a mere girl, she convoyed her younger brothers and sisters from Edgeworthtown to Bristol, to the ex-

treme old age which busied itself in relieving the miseries of the great Famine, she lived a life whose sensibility never degenerated into sentimentality and whose regard for the world about her was shrewd, sane, and kind. Much of her work was didactic — too evidently didactic, no doubt, for the highest artistic effect, and, perhaps, for the most lasting influence; but generally speaking, it was "wholesome as maize," with that kind of healthfulness which is founded upon confidence in the Scheme of Things. Like Margaret Fuller, she "accepted the Universe," but without any heroic calling of heaven and earth to witness.

The same judgement may be passed upon Jane Austen, whose general attitude toward life is not unlike Miss Edgeworth's. Her years were scarcely half as many, her work much less voluminous, her art of a distinctly finer quality. She had none of the encouragement to write and publish which the eccentric Master of Edgeworthtown supplied to his daughter; but wrought quietly at her desk in the common sitting-room, keeping her own counsel, covering her work from curious eyes, and, after it was done, laying it away altogether for a decade. When at last this discipline of obscurity was over, the world of letters entered into possession of the most exquisite gallery of miniatures which English readers have ever seen or are ever likely to see. Indeed it is doubtful if what may be called the miniature method is capable of clearer and more

suggestive effects than those which she made it produce. Her people, plots, and methods harmonize with the Hampshire landscape which she knew so well. There is a trimness and eminent decency about them all which might easily have become smug and commonplace under a less skilful hand. But Jane Austen not only had a deft hand; she had a keenly observant eye which, while peculiarly sensitive to the formalities and pomposities of provincial life, saw behind this curtain into its variety of character; and she tempered the activity of both eye and hand by the generous impulses of a tolerant heart. Macaulay, who, while quite capable of extravagance, rarely indulged in extravagant eulogy, compared her work to that of Shakespeare. It is dangerous praise because the reader begins at once to enumerate the mighty Shakespearian qualities to which Jane Austen can lay no claim; but it has this saving remnant of truth, that she understands her people after a Shakespearian fashion. The little group who appear upon her ivory tablet are instinct with as real a life as the larger company upon Shakespeare's stage. Many of them are typical; they have a similar faculty for self-revelation, requiring little description beyond that which their own speech supplies; and toward them all their creator manifests a similar generosity of attitude. It is the tolerance not of mere indulgence or indifference, but of faith. The little man, hot upon some vil-

lain's trail and terribly afraid lest, if he be not damned to-day he may miss damnation altogether, is a sufficiently familiar figure in the world. The author who is never satisfied except when plunging his villain in the ink-pot, or his fellow of quite as irritating a type who must needs insist that his villain is a hero, are both men of little wit because of little faith. The masters of song and story must have enough of God's creative faculty to use it after the divine manner. Their sun shines and their rain falls upon the evil and the good. Their wheat and tares are permitted to grow together until the harvest. They are not hurried and exigent in judgement.

Miss Austen's men and women usually reveal their characters early in our acquaintance with them, but after such a manner that we feel, if we be wise people, that much further converse is needed before any trustworthy estimate can be made. Meanwhile she is tolerant of them and asks us to be so. Let the reader open his "Pride and Prejudice" to the conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet relative to the new tenant of Netherfield Park, and he will see what I mean. Mr. Bennet's satiric humour and the general fatuity of his wife become evident at the first interview. These traits give complexion to the characters of both throughout the story; yet with such general truth to life that neither quite bores us, while each becomes a recognized type, and develops after va-

rious adventures into a person whom, in spite of selfishness and limitation, we accept into the circle of our friends. Let it be admitted that the women of the creator of Elizabeth Bennet are better than her men; it still remains true that her men — Mr. Bennet, for instance, and the Reverend but otherwise unspeakable Mr. Collins in the novel under discussion — are not unworthy to appear beside them. Together, her characters form a group of unimpeachable witnesses to the interest of common life: to the variety underlying the everyday affairs of everyday people, if the observer have an eye capable of penetrating a thin disguise of humdrum; to the abiding worth of truth, simplicity, and kindness; and to the wholesome appetite for living which such qualities develop. These are precisely the characteristics which religion tends to foster when accepted and cultivated in a large and generous way. They as surely atrophy and give place to a sort of bitterness, sometimes cynical, sometimes querulous, and again passionately tragic, when faith fails.

Sir Walter Scott is perhaps the greatest exemplar of the truth which Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen thus illustrated. He was a chief of the romantic movement, which touched them only lightly if at all. He was a poet of considerable distinction and almost unexampled popularity, while they wrote little more than occasional verses. He was moreover an essayist and historian whose work in these de-

partments of letters is still remembered and sometimes read. But it was a true instinct which led him with characteristic humility to acknowledge his indebtedness to Miss Edgeworth and his admiration of Miss Austen; for he was to achieve a colossal eminence — I do not think the adjective extravagant — through the application to literature of the same general romantic principles and convictions which animated them. He has left a record of the ambition with which a reading of Miss Edgeworth's "Castle Rackrent," "The Absentee," and "Ormond" inspired him. "I felt that something might be attempted for my own country of the same kind with that which she has so fortunately achieved for Ireland." His comment upon Miss Austen's work after a third reading of "Pride and Prejudice" is so well known as to be almost hackneyed. "The Big Bow-wow strain I can do myself like any now going; but the exquisite touch, which renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting, from the truth of the description and the sentiment, is denied to me."[1] A host of the humbler children of his own imagination, who are known to a wider circle of readers than Miss Austen can ever expect, rise up to question the sweep of this disclaimer; but the generosity which breathes through both these tributes was perfectly characteristic, and introduces us at once to the nobler and more spiritual side of Sir Walter's nature. To say that this

[1] Diary, March 14, 1826. Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, vol. vi, chap. 7.

generosity was always impartially exercised would be to claim too much. Like most rich and romantic natures, he was capable of strong prejudices which were never concealed and rarely very rigidly repressed. The pageants of warfare, the sound of drum and trumpet, the gallant pomp and circumstance of chivalry, the mingled majesty and pettiness of courts, fascinated him. Foreordained from the foundation of the world to be a Loyalist and to cast in his lot with what may be called the Stuart element in life, he yet did it all nobly enough to escape the supercilious narrowness and conceit of mere Toryism. A lover of the past, and especially of the Middle Ages, which he painted "as we should have wished them to have been," he was yet no mere reactionary, but a full-blooded and warm-hearted man among men. If we cannot sympathize with his reverence for kingship when kingship was embodied in George IV, we can at least remember that he was one of those believers in rank who can make honest friends in a class beneath their own, as the memory of Tom Purdie and the mutual affection which existed between him and his master bear witness to this day. It also remains true that some of the characters whom Scott chose from among the poor, like Davie Deans and his daughter, or Caleb Balderstone, are quite as sure of immortality as the rather complexionless though very gentlemanly Guy Mannering and Edward Waverley.

As contrasted with the religious and philosophic

doubters, Scott was so pronounced a believer that he felt under little obligation to make explicit confessions of faith; but the truth which seemed most self-evident to him was that God made man in His own image and endowed him with something of His own creative power; while the command which made immediate appeal to his nature was that which directed him to replenish and subdue the earth and to have dominion in it.

Here in the realm of creative faculty Scott wrought by authority of genuine inspiration. He was a poet in the old Greek sense of 'maker,' and by a better right than his verse-making could confer, spirited as the verses are. It is when we think of him in this aspect of creator that our patience is most sorely tried by the swarm of critics who have condescended to him, patronized him, and assured us that he did as well as could be expected in view of the imperfect understanding of the art of fiction prevalent in his day. To name, with reluctance in this connection, the best of them, one wonders how so good and generally sensible a critic as Mr. Howells — the master of so pretty an art of his own withal — could have brought himself to comfort readers who were a little perturbed at being told that Sir Walter's day was passed, with the assurance that after all "he can still amuse young people." It is well said rather than well meant. Balaam-like, Mr. Howells has blessed when he thought to curse; for not only has Sir Walter Scott amused young people

for more than four-score years: during no small portion of that time they have been the same people, who have found their youth renewed and their pulses genially quickened as they rode across the Border or went on pilgrimage with him. "We did not one of us go to bed last night; nothing slept but my gout," said Lord Holland when asked his opinion of "Old Mortality" after a night with it; and though the day for such enthusiasm is doubtless gone, the stimulus and tonic of Scott's presence are still real. He is accused of failure to make his people speak in character, and Mr. Brander Matthews opines that the stories most likely "to retain readers in the first quarter of the twentieth century are perhaps those in which he best withstands the comparison with Miss Edgeworth." Now I am altogether disposed to admit that Miss Edgeworth knew her art — and her place; and he who runs may still read the letter to Ballantyne in which she praises the author of "Waverley" "for the perfect manner in which character is ever sustained in every change of situation from first to last, without effort, without the affectation of making the persons speak in character." [1] From the standpoint of the photographer, Turner is unquestionably erratic; and many a clever moulder in clay is, when face to face with Michael Angelo, abundantly competent to criticise the symmetry of Moses's horns; yet the glory of Turner's colour does

[1] Letter to the Author of "Waverley," *Aut Scotus, aut Diabolus;* Oct. 23, 1814.

not fade nor does Michael Angelo's grotesque and mistaken literalism rob Moses's face of majesty. It is not true that the possession of great creative faculty sets men above the immutable laws of right and wrong; but it does give them a charter to speak their own language and to contemn, if they choose, the latest fashions in literary and artistic phylacteries.

Perhaps the most significant criticism of the religious element in Scott's work is that by Walter Bagehot, who not only illuminated economic matters by the play of a lusty imagination, but brought to the criticism of literature and religion the trained sagacity of a financier. He notes in his admirable essay on the Waverley Novels,[1] that creeds are among the author's data. They are taken for granted. Each character has his faith and keeps it. There is no doubt, no unbelief, scarce any shadow upon faith cast by the turning of circumstance. This means, not that Scott was indifferent to religion; but rather that his own faith was of the sort which he depicts, — sturdy, unshaken, careless of definition, equally careless of perfect consistency perhaps, but accepted as the necessary background of a sane and wholesome life. He does not often care to inquire into the fundamental pro and con of it; but when he does picture the soul face to face with its great questions, as in the case of the camp-followers in "Quentin Durward" under condemnation of death and

[1] *Literary Studies*, vol. ii.

discussing their possible future, the reader feels his power. He chose ordinarily to treat religion in its outward aspects, as a part of the gear or furnishing of every normal life. Only with difficulty could he understand the Puritan, because the Puritan based his religion very largely upon, or perhaps, better, built it up about, a great, central, personal experience, and it was no part of Scott's general plan to enter life's holy of holies. He liked better the interplay of character and incident as it appeared in the outer courts, where men dealt with one another, than the transactions of the confessional or the altar, where they dealt with God. Indeed he has the prejudice of a man of the world against much reference to closet and altar.

One of the grounds of complaint against the Puritan is that he emphasized so pronouncedly this personal relation of accountability to God. Ever conscious of the Great Taskmaster's eye, the Puritan's main concern was to meet its approval; this gained, he could afford to be indifferent to all else. Conscious too that his soul was naked and open before Him with whom he had to do, he too often stood spiritually naked and unashamed before his fellows. Not only was this naturally unpleasant to a man of Scott's character and tastes, but the Puritan speech which grew out of these deep experiences and which was vividly coloured by them must have proved equally repulsive to him; especially and rightfully so when its great terms became commonplace and

degenerated, as it were, into the small change of daily and worldly business. Here lay the snare of hypocrisy in which the feet of Puritanism were too often entangled. The outstanding, purposeful hypocrite whom ill-natured critics so generally clothe in Puritan garb was no more likely to appear in conventicle than in cathedral; probably less likely, since, from the standpoint of worldly advantage, the cathedral has usually had more to offer; but there is danger lest the soul, ploughed deep and made fruitful by experience, shall, if too often thrown open to curiosity-seekers, or even to those bent on profit and instruction, be beaten back into its old encrusted barrenness again; danger, too, lest terms once warm with vital meaning shall become cold and insignificant as they grow common; until the unwary, having learned to say the words, are deceived into fancying that they possess the thing.

Scott never learned to observe these great distinctions; never seemed to remember that there cannot be an arrant hypocrisy without an equally eminent reality from which to copy; but loved to make his Puritan and Covenanter types extreme. It is not here that his genuinely religious sense — a sort of religious common-sense — appears to best advantage. This product of religion furnished him much material which he used with considerable effect, though the type of character forged from it does not always ring artistically true. Now and then, however, as in "The Heart of Mid-Lothian," he

went deeper into reality. Those who say that Scott always worked from without and never sounded the depths of human passion must reckon with Jeanie Deans; as must the other critics who are dubious of his ability to paint a genuine woman. The figures of David and Jeanie Deans deserve a place in the same gallery which preserves the "Cottar's Saturday Night." Like Burns before and Carlyle after him, Scott discerned the source of his country's power. He knew that it lay in no small measure in the "pure religion breathing household laws" which these groups exemplify, and which Davie illustrates the more perfectly as we observe the struggle between love, pride, and reverence for law in his nature. The love and fear which lay at the heart of genuine Puritan character were never meant to be antagonistic. Their final purpose is mutual enrichment; and if one struggle to cast out the other it is like the wrestling of Jacob with his guardian angel. In the better balanced Puritan natures the fear — which simply represented a believer's sense of the majesty and exigence of Law in the spiritual world, corresponding thus to the similar revelation which science has made of late in the realm of physical phenomena — kept the love from degenerating into sentimentality; while the love tempered the fear into reverence. Of course it has not often suited a romancer's purpose to represent the better balanced Puritan natures, and it certainly did not suit Scott's. He could make profit of the super-

stition and fanaticism which are among the diseased by-products of the spiritual nature, and in "Old Mortality" has given us an ever-memorable picture of religious ferocity. Even here, however, he scarce attempts to deal with the soul, but contents himself with the outward phenomena of Habakkuk Mucklewrath and his insanity.

There is therefore some ground for Bagehot's criticism of Scott for his neglect to give us "a delineation of the soul."

"We have mind, manners, animation, but it is the stir of this world. We miss the consecrating power; and we miss it not only in its own peculiar sphere, which, from the difficulty of introducing the deepest elements into a novel, would have been scarcely matter for a harsh criticism, but in the place where a novelist might most be expected to delineate it,"

that is, in the love affairs of his heroes and heroines. Bagehot, keen and, in the main, just as his criticism is, seems to me inclined to push it too far. It is doubtful if the Waverley Novels would have profited by more psychology; they might have been enriched by a wider and deeper sympathy with religious experience. Yet even this measure of fault-finding must be qualified by grateful recognition of the fact that Scott's world was after all essentially divine. A great, mysterious, far-reaching, and, as he dared to believe, ultimately benevolent Power wrought in it at His task of reward and retribution. Whatever life might be, — and he made small

attempt to define it, — honour, courage, mercy, and reverence fitted its needs and ministered to its development. Whatever death might be, — and through all his work the fascination of its mystery appears, — nothing so well prepared a man for its adventure as that goodness which is religion's best fruit. "My dear, be a good man . . . be a good man. Nothing else will give you any comfort when you come to lie here." There may be those who fail to discern a distinctly religious, to say nothing of a Christian, element in this. By so much they miss the deeper import of Christianity's Founder.

Something of the same enterprise upon which Scott embarked when he revived the romantic novel and gave it an historic setting, was undertaken along different lines by Cooper and Marryat. They could lay no claim to Scott's genius; nor did they attempt his elaborate historical framework. Both however showed originality and ability in depicting scenes and phases of life which were eminently characteristic of their youth, and which were threatened with supersession, if not with extinction, by the material progress of the century. Cooper's interest in the Frontier was as real and natural as Scott's in the Border. Both Cooper and Marryat knew the sea at first hand, and felt as keen a relish for perpetuating those features of its life which were threatened by steam, as Scott felt for the loyalties and feuds of the Highlands into which southern civilization was making fatal inroads. In the spirit which animated

them and the wholesome atmosphere wherein their stories all develop, they are worthy of their elder and greater brother. Any detailed criticism of their work is denied to us here; but it is worth while to notice that not only were both sympathetic with the commonly received Christianity of their day, but both could go out of their way to support pet theological or ecclesiastical tenets. Cooper, who lacked a highly developed sense of humour, was capable in the "The Crater" of almost swamping a capital sea-story by overloading it with dissertations upon the advantages of episcopacy and the dangers inherent in democracy; Marryat, whose humour was as natural and sometimes as effervescent as that of Dickens, avoids these grosser pitfalls, but even he likes to mount the pulpit now and then, especially in such a book as "Masterman Ready." Indeed, one unfeeling editor of this classic ventures a sigh of relief at the old sailor's death, exhibiting thereby his own lack of insight into the hearts of seamen and of boys. For, though neither Cooper nor Marryat was a perfect artist, both knew that the discipline and peril of the sea breed not only recklessness and desperation, but deep and beautiful reverences as well. Life on shipboard is no school for saints of the ascetic type; but like life upon the frontier or in the forests, it sometimes nurtures a faith at once humble and robust. Long Tom Coffin and old Ready have the hearts of little children; the courage, endurance, and staunchness of heroes; not a little of

the gentleness which becomes heroism so well; and an implicit faith in God above, in His guidance of mundane affairs, and in a merciful but retributive justice which shall one day declare itself, to the confusion of all dishonour and the exaltation of righteousness. They recognized and did reverence to the nearer and more obvious mysteries which inhere in life and death. But the subtler dilemmas which both faced in the warfare waged against their fellow-men — a struggle in which Tom Coffin rejoiced, and which, when forced upon Ready, he undertook in self-defence without a qualm — play no larger part in either story than they played in the life of its author's day. It is as well. There are deeps in experience which may be sailed upon with profit long before we find ourselves able to sound them. Cooper and Marryat are sure of an abiding though modest fame, because they describe a life in which the capacity of man to compel the service of nature's rudest forces is most brilliantly illustrated, and because their story is instinct with reverence for great and wholesome things, — God, fatherland, truth, honour, duty, and clean love.

The transition from Cooper and Marryat to Poe is like a plunge from noon to midnight; though it may be added that the noon is of ordinary daylight, while the midnight is of unique mystery, as though the sun were not only turned to darkness, but the moon to blood, and the very stars to balefires. Much good paper has been soiled by the con-

troversy over Poe's character — or lack of it. Suffice it to say here that he was capable on the one hand of great virtues and great vices, and that he tested his capacity; but that, on the other hand, he seemed incapable of the measure of self-control necessary to a mastery of the art of living with his fellows. His career was a tragedy for which no one but himself can be held responsible; his death, following upon a debauch encouraged if not induced by a gang of base politicians in order that they might use him as a "repeater" in a Baltimore election, is well-nigh as grotesque a horror as any which he ever imagined. What his personal attitude toward faith may have been it is probably useless to inquire. He did not choose in his published writings to say much about it beyond what is contained in his strange "Eureka," from which those who can are welcome to extract a coherent utterance. His conversation filled one man with admiration not merely for the gifts of his mind but for the graces of his heart; while another heard only the words of defiance, blasphemy, and reprobation. Perhaps both are right. Poe was not only many-sided like most men; he seems — unlike most men — to have been gifted with the ability permanently to impress the stamp of his different phases upon different groups of people.

To-day his place as the high-priest of all who worship the grotesque is secure. They are not an altogether wholesome company; yet their existence

and their cult is significant. In a sense Poe's work constitutes a genuine religious apologetic; his testimony to the abiding place and power of faith is real if not great; it is convincing so far as it goes even if it do not go very far. The tribute which he pays to faith is comparable to that which superstition pays to religion. Superstition has this basis in truth, that it arises out of a consciousness of the mystery of life and of the proximity of forces which from the standpoint of present experience are to be feared.

Sin brings judgement; death introduces evident confusion into life here, and may introduce a yet more poignant suffering into some life beyond; so the man of primitive religious culture reasons, or feels if he does not reason. The untamed forces of nature suggest sin and death to him. Seeing the part which selfishness and arbitrary whim play in the life about him, he leaps to the conclusion that the ultimate powers of the universe are susceptible of a similar but vastly more significant petulance, and hence they must be propitiated in strange and whimsical ways; and since there is always cause for fear in dealing with selfish and petulant natures, lest one should not do enough or should do the wrong thing, and since fear is cruel, superstition issues naturally in cruel and horrid rites. Amid a thousand grotesque or dreadful forms one feature of superstition remains constant. The superstitious man is always the inadequate man; he is never

master of his fate; he has no key to experience; by so much as he doubts the sanity of the universe, his own sanity and self-control are weakened.

It is the office of religion to reassure him by its insistence upon the ultimate solvency of the scheme of things. It speaks of the power and the love of God. It exhorts a man to cultivate those graces of power and love which are the image in himself of the divine nature; to get rid of sin by way of repentance and forgiveness; to cast in his lot with the forces that make for righteousness; and then to rejoice in the assurance of faith. Religion always makes for courage because it assures a man that, having thus cast in his lot with God, he is adequate to all experience. Mysteries remain; but their sting of fear is plucked away. Sin has still to be reckoned with; but like a foul disease which forgiveness can purge. Death waits; but to serve instead of to conquer the forces of highest life. The superstitious and the religious man look out upon the same scene; they behold and bear witness to the same untamed elements in experience. Yet with this difference: the superstitious man creeps in fear under hedges, or shakes with horror in corners, not daring to look experience squarely in the face, exaggerating its possible fearfulness because he has caught but glimpses of it, and making ready, should it finally seek him out, to propitiate it by wild and dreadful homage. The religious man is in the saddle on life's main highway; looking out

of clear eyes; armed as he believes adequately for such conflict as may be required of him; and very confident that, unless he grow boastful and self-satisfied, strength will be supplied not only to enable him to give a good account of himself, but to tame and turn to friendly use these very enemies which his neighbour fears. He meets in the sunshine, with a brave front, and to his profit, that which the other dreads and shuns.

The grotesque in literature smacks usually either of humour or of horror. It may be the product of a robust faith's play, as in the humour of Rabelais, Dickens, or "Mr. Dooley." This is sometimes coarse and even gross, as Rabelaisian humour proverbially is; it is sometimes farcical, like that of Pickwick; or again good-naturedly satirical, like that of the Archey Road philosopher. But its grotesqueness, being born of exaggeration which, however absurd, is still open and all in the daylight, remains relatively sound and wholesome. It is the exaggeration of patent and perhaps commonplace realities.

The grotesqueness of horror, on the other hand, comes of the exaggeration of mystery. It catches the shadows, which lengthen as the sweet and wholesome sun goes down into creatures of dusk and phantoms of midnight. To these things which commonly inspire doubt in the mind, even while they half fascinate the imagination, it gives a sort of dreadful validity. To assign them a local habita-

tion and a name would be to go too far and to rob them of something of their power. The master of the grotesquely dreadful strives to make a Presence felt — a Presence undefinable as the obscurity which frames it, but near and real as conscience, subtly powerful as the breath of pestilence, inevitable and sinister as fate.

Poe's best work is a telling reminder of man's powerlessness and misery in the realm where faith is denied to him. His Tales of Conscience, like "William Wilson" and "The Man of the Crowd," are significant of the inevitable nature of remorse. There is little condemnation in them, but there is absolutely no hope. To make the contrast between superstition and faith complete they need to be read in conjunction with the first chapter of Isaiah, whose hope is as reasonable and indomitable as its indictment of sin is explicit. But the Tales of Conscience are neither the most artistic nor the most significant to religion of Poe's work. It is in the even more dreadful and enthralling narratives, like the "Fall of the House of Usher," the "Masque of the Red Death," the "Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," and the "Narrative of A. Gordon Pym"[1] that his power to marshal the forces of terror comes into full play. Here we find men face

[1] I do not claim that this "Narrative" stands upon the artistic level of the shorter "Tales;" but it is at once of great interest and much significance to those who either know the sea or wish to know Poe.

to face with the mystery of sin, or disease, or death; mystery which is moreover girt about with power and wrapped in a cloud of haunting fear. Nor can the fear be resolved. The man is in thrall to it. He is reft out of his natural element of light, reason, and faith. Anything may come to pass—except the normal and healthy. Pym and his companions are helpless in the grip of fate, which will not let them profit by their sailor's skill and mastery of circumstance, but mocks them with doom. The experimenter with the corpse of Valdemar approaches the verge of miraculous success; resuscitation seems imminent. But all the while Poe's demon is working his dreadful will upon the tissues. The dead man's apparent response to magnetic influence is a ghastly mockery, to be kept up only during the term of their relative integrity. Its period reached, decay asserts itself instantaneously, and what was once the form of a man becomes a thing to be fled from with fear and loathing.

This is the underlying motive of the "Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque." Man is taken out of the realm of light, reason, and capacity for dominion, in which God set him, and made subject to weird and baleful dæmonic influences. Death, sin, and mystery are, to be sure, in man's world; but they need never tyrannize over any man who will claim his birthright of faith. Indeed he never looms so large as when asserting his claim to manhood in

their apparent despite. Take this away, make him subject to these great servants of his, and he not only shrinks into relative impotence himself, but the sight of him thus harassed and haunted sends a thrill of fear to the heart of the beholder. "Thus it might be in the world," he says to himself, "should the sun of God's reason suffer eclipse, or His image in man fade out."

A very different manifestation of the grimness which verges upon the grotesque of terror appears in the work of Charlotte and Emily Brontë, induced no doubt, upon the one hand, by the disappointments and contradictions of their lives, and upon the other by the bleakness of the great uplands amid which they dwelt. It would be easy to illustrate this from "Jane Eyre" or "Shirley." No one who has read the former will be likely to forget the night of Jane's introduction to Rochester's house, with its "characteristics of sad sky, cold gale, and continued small, penetrating rain"; while the often quoted passage from the latter, picturing the autumn storm beating upon Jessy's grave, is its worthy companion. Wind, rain, and winter bring something more than weather into the work of the Brontës; they dominate and give essential complexion to it, as Egdon Heath rules Mr. Hardy's "Return of the Native"; and it is for this reason that I should choose the "Wuthering Heights" of Emily Brontë as representing most vividly the characteristics of their thought. The very name is but the Yorkshire

form of 'Weathering;' yet the storms which assault the outside of these grim stone walls are a mere shadow of the elemental conflict within, as Heathcliff works out his lifelong scheme of revenge. The life at Wuthering Heights has its times and seasons like the moor outside; but, still like the moor, it is never genial. The best that these passionate lives can do in the interests of peace reaches only to the extent of a brief armed neutrality, behind whose screen the forces of scorn, hate, and half-insane love rearrange themselves for a new outbreak. The reader will remember that at the last, when Heathcliff is found dead, it is not only with the marks of scorn and hate still stamped upon his features, but with hair and raiment sodden by the rain which has beaten through the open window beside which he died. The incident is more than accident. After such a fashion was this man's nature the plaything of savage and sinister influence from childhood. Master —and ruthless master — of every creature that dwelt with him, he was never master of his own soul. Having played his game with fate and been defeated, he bids fair at the last — it is almost the only gleam of warm sunshine that the book contains — to be balked in his ultimate revenge by the wakening of sweet and natural love between Earnshaw and Catherine, whom his malice has robbed, the one of his patrimony and the other of her free and happy girlhood.

Hawthorne was a greater artist than Emily Brontë,

though it is doubtful if he had her keen sense of the sweep and play of passion. Indeed he may almost be said to begin where she leaves off, since he usually deals with the fruit and consequence of passion. The Brontë world is at least well defined. It is articulate even though the roar of storm, oaths, and the snarl of savage dogs are necessary for its utterance. Hawthorne introduces us into the realm of burdened conscience, longing for peace with groans that cannot be uttered. It has become a fashion to speak of his world as unreal. Nothing could be further from the truth. His world is as real as Defoe's; but his realities are at once too intimate and too closely bound up with personality to be easily defined. The nearest and best-known things, like light, love, and conscience, are often the most truly mysterious, because they hurry us at once, when we stop to contemplate them, behind the veil of phenomena, into the world of 'Things as they Are,' where as yet we are not quite at home. Mystery is an essential element in Hawthorne's work because he is so true to life. The weird and fanciful may readily enough find a playground there, for his imagination is almost preternaturally active; but we do not miss, though we may sometimes fail to measure, his meaning, and the ways along which he guides us are the main travelled roads of the soul. It is here that we contrast him with Poe. Poe takes us by the hand, leads us into a darkened theatre, and there displays a scene at which we wonder and shudder. Such mastery of

mechanism, such intricacy of plot, such command of dreadful *grotesquerie*, which is yet self-command in that it respects the borders of the absurd and does not trespass there, we feel that we have never seen. The cleverness wherewith stage properties are contrived and manipulated passes our understanding. This magician is no purveyor of blood-and-thunder clap-trap; he is a man of genius to whom we do glad homage. But when we catch our breath it is to remind ourselves that after all we are watching something upon the stage; though something significant of what life might be if the human will were to abdicate its throne and become subject to the vagaries of mere circumstance. It comforts us to remember that the human mind contrived them. Poe shows us little that is worthy to be called conduct, since his stage is ruled so tyrannously by circumstance and he moves so generally in the sphere of the physical. Emily Brontë on the other hand pictures conduct, and conduct primarily. It seems in one aspect almost impossible in the grotesqueness of its passion and malice; but she compels our hearts to whisper a warning against unbelief, and to be mindful of their own perverse capacities.

Hawthorne takes little heed of stage properties; he hurries over the chapter of conduct upon which the world will sit in judgement, and then with marvellous art weaves an almost transparent veil of limpid speech through which we look with him into the souls of men; or now and then substitutes for

it a mirror in which we see our own. As Mr. Brander Matthews has somewhere said, "Hawthorne's effects are moral where Poe's are merely physical." Yet Poe, as I have tried to indicate, has moral implications. Emily Brontë lays her scene in Hell and teaches all that doom can teach. Hawthorne's sphere in his most characteristic work is Purgatory. "His chief theme was the play of conscience under a sense of sin and guilt."[1] But whether in "The Scarlet Letter," with its story of Hester's sin which, because impossible of concealment, found half its sting plucked away, as contrasted with Dimmesdale's seven years of torment which could only work atonement through confession; or in "The House of Seven Gables," with its study of heredity and its great lesson that wrong done in one generation may have to be expiated and may also be purged by the work of grace upon another; or in "The Marble Faun," with its mysterious suggestions of a human soul brought to its birth through the pangs of a great moral crisis, — everywhere we are reminded that all true life is to be expressed in the terms of the spirit. The great ultimate question is a moral one. Sin is an intimate and a dreadful reality, however it be defined; but it is not hopeless so long as men feel it.

Hawthorne was no Churchman; but his instinct as an artist guided him at once to the most significant things, not merely in Puritanism but in life; and they proved to be the things of religion.

[1] T. T. Munger, *Essays for the Day*, p. 109.

CHAPTER IX

THE MASTERS OF FICTION. II

Among the demons — and their name is Legion — who possess literary critics, none is more ubiquitous or vicious than the Demon of Comparison. His special province would appear to be the encouragement of partisanship, prejudice, and all that makes against catholicity of taste. His most facile tool is the devotee whom he can arm in behalf of a favourite writer or school with the weapons of disparagement. The platitude that there is no accounting for tastes, with its corollary that, within large limits, every man is welcome to his own, smacks to his ears of heresy; while the theory that life is so varied and personality so intricate as to justify an almost infinite variety of treatment is anathema itself.

I am led to these rather trite observations by our approach to a group of great men who are paired, not so often in natural conjunction as in suspicious if not hostile contrast. They are, of course, Dickens and Thackeray in the realm of fiction, Tennyson and Browning in that of poetry. It may not be unjustifiable to attempt an estimate of their comparative influence to-day, or of their prospective fame a hundred years hence. The office of constructive and

interpretative criticism is of course to characterize the quality of each, and in so doing some references to the work of his fellow is inevitable. But the criticism whose instinct is to exalt one at the expense of the other immediately proclaims its pettiness and throws just suspicion upon its validity. There is a note sometimes discernible in our praise of dogs which challenges the bystander to speak of cats if he dare; while those who respond quickly to the high distinction and inscrutable grace of feline beauty, are too often repelled by the dog's effusiveness. Such fools are we, and so slow of heart to perceive the wealth of Being from which Nature is ever offering delight and enrichment to us in these common things, that it is little wonder if we remain meagre and narrow in our spiritual appreciations.

We must remember that men are spiritually incommensurable. We may compare their bulk and stature; note the general direction in which their choices trend; estimate in some rough and fragmentary way their influence upon their fellows: but the essence of personality escapes us. We lack its formula. What we cannot define, we cannot accurately compare; and it is probably true that the things we know most intimately are most impossible of exact definition, — personality and genius among them. I shall be reminded that this is precisely the doctrine of Mr. Squeers: "She's a rum 'un is Natur'. . . . Natur' is more easier conceived than

described"; [1] and that it affords a too comfortable refuge for our ignorance; which is very true if our ignorance be contented and slothful. No less certainly does it guide the feet of self-convicted and alert ignorance into the ways of truth, because it keeps the heart humble and stands as a defence against the proverbial danger of a little learning.

There was not only abundant room, there was also distinct need in the early Victorian era for two painters of life with the diverse gifts of Dickens and Thackeray. The man who proclaims his allegiance to one through disparagement of the other thereby declares his own insensibility to certain aspects of life; while he who would characterize either by any epithet or label discovers how inadequate a phrase is for the expression of a man. We call Dickens an idealist, only to be reminded upon the next reading of a chapter that his mind was perhaps the most perfect photographic plate to which the life of middle and lower-class England has ever been exposed, and

[1] I owe this quotation to the *Charles Dickens* of Mr. G. K. Chesterton, who uses it for quite another purpose; and I may take this opportunity to express my further indebtedness to Mr. Chesterton for some light, much amusement, and considerable vexation. Studying a serious theme with him is a little like viewing a landscape by the aid of a boy's fireworks. The occasional rocket is not only memorable in itself, but really illuminates the scene; the intervening squibs are numerous and distracting. They splutter merrily, but do little to further the main purpose. Or, to change the figure for a worthier, Mr. Chesterton seems to me to be, like Ruskin, an entertaining companion if one know the way, but an uncertain guide. His characterization of Dickens is undeniably clever, sometimes very penetrating, and quite as often a little perverse.

that the impression has been indelibly fixed. One is tempted to think that there was scarce a cruet-stand in a humble English cupboard that Dickens did not know. He saw and makes us see the very stains and crumbs upon the table in dingy inn-parlours where we must dine with him. Indeed this mastery of dinginess which our modern realists covet so was a chief characteristic of his. No one, not even Mr. Gissing, has seemed to be more at home amid the dust and squalor of London. Yet in one respect Dickens, like Thackeray, though perhaps in an even higher degree, differentiates himself from the 'realist' of the modern school. His hand refused to be permanently subdued to the hue of that in which it wrought. He was incorrigibly given to letting his dust dance sometimes in a sunbeam; and he insisted to the end that even puddles might reflect the stars. Thackeray is as glibly assigned to the ranks of the 'realists,' and has of course his place there; but it would be better for modern 'realism' if it were content to measure itself by its master's standard instead of compelling him to reflect its own theories. Thackeray is relentless in pursuit and exposure of selfish motive; but he is as certainly a preacher of the possibility and the need of a better basis for life in the soul and in the world than selfishness can offer; as must appear to any unprejudiced reader who will follow him from the opening chapter of "Catherine" to the conclusion of the "Adventures of Philip." Indeed there are times, as

in these very opening scenes of "Catherine," before his art had perfected itself, when his satire becomes so homiletic as to affect us a little like the too explicit moral of a fable. It was needed, however, in that day of "Paul Clifford" and the rascal-hero's vogue, and one reason why it seems superfluous now is that its work was done so well.

The appeal of religion to Dickens was inevitable; and it was quite as inevitable that his response should be somewhat unconventional. He might have characterized it as the answer of his heart to the all-inclusive humanity and charity of Christ. Of the dogmatic formulas of Christianity he made small account, and of the Christian Church as a great development in history he was half-oblivious. Yet radical though he liked to think himself, he was responsive to the Church of England and duly contemptuous of Dissenters. The grey beauty of old church fabrics touched his feeling for the romantic, and the music of the ritual found ready answer in his own highly developed, though too little chastened rhetorical sense. In his somewhat elaborate will he exhorted his children to pattern their lives upon the precepts of the Gospel, and it will be remembered that, with characteristic assurance, he once edited the New Testament for their use.

In his novels, however, what may be roughly called organized religion plays no very large part. Ministers of religion rarely appear conspicuously, unless it be in caricature, as in the cases of Stiggins and

Chadband. Mr. Crisparkle in "Edwin Drood" is meant to appeal to the reader as a Christian and a gentleman. Opinions differ as to his success, and, since the book in which he figures remains a fragment, no especial significance attaches to his character. Toward all asceticism this great apostle of meat, drink, and good comradeship was, of course, constitutionally unsympathetic. He was preëminently a man of crowds and cities. The bustle of the streets and the stimulus of their restlessness were needful conditions, he thought, to his own best work; and he was probably right. Life, in his view of it, was the life of multitudes; yet no student of the mass, if, indeed, student be not too cold and detached a word to use of him, was ever more conscious of the individual or quicker to catch and fix his characteristics. Here we approach the key to such religious significance as the work of Dickens possesses.

He was eminently, almost divinely, humane. A great creator, like his predecessor, Scott, and his contemporary, Thackeray, he may have shown less than they of the creative patience which permits wheat and tares to approach the harvest undisturbed; but he entered into his creatures' life of good or ill with well-nigh unexampled self-abandon. Thus and thus only can we account for the inevitable cogency of his appeal upon the one hand, and for his too frequent extravagance upon the other. So sane a critic as Mr. P. E. More has said that, despite his own experience of poverty, Dickens viewed the poor man

from a superior standpoint and treated him from the outside, not, like George Gissing, as though poverty were bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. There is an element of truth in this, but I incline to think it truer that Dickens refused to feel that even poverty was a sufficiently masterful circumstance permanently to rule a man's character. The Gissings [1] and Gorkys are after all the real materialists — the true devotees of the great god Circumstance. In depicting the poor they too often cease to paint men; and Mr. Chesterton has very justly pointed the contrast by his discovery in it of one large element of Dickens's power not only to charm two generations of readers, but to effect practical reforms. Both Gissing and Dickens, he says, "agreed that the souls of the people were in a kind of prison. But Gissing said that the prison was full of dead souls. Dickens said that the prison was full of living souls. And the fiery cavalcade of rescuers felt that they had not come too late." [2] This humanity displays two characteristics that align Dickens with the deeper religious forces of his age. It shows a third which is at once more conventional and more 'practical.' The first two I shall call his childlikeness and his essential purity; the last, his reforming purpose.

The rather supercilious admission that Sir Walter

[1] This is true of Gissing only in his occasional and lesser aspect. There is a greater side, to which I try to do justice in a later chapter.

[2] G. K. Chesterton, *Charles Dickens*, pp. 279–280.

Scott will for some time continue to amuse young people has already been noted. In something the same tone we are reminded from time to time of the appeal which Dickens makes to childhood. The charge, if charge it be, is true. The delight with which intelligent children read their Dickens is unique; they feel his power; they see eye to eye with him; the fountain of their ready tears responds alike to his humour and his pathos. They do not stop to ask how it is done, because they do not care. Upon their return to him in later life the quality of this appeal is found to be somewhat changed. If the spirit of inquiry into the mechanism of things be dominant in them, they are likely to be oppressed by the glaring lapses of his art. Unless they retain something of a child's capacity to find enjoyment in an episode or in a character, much of his charm must have fled. But over those whose eyes are still open to the wonder of common life he rules as of old; though less by reason of his story, whose faultiness is now too patent, than by his extraordinary capacity to catch some impulse of the heart, some episode in experience, or some strongly individual trait of character, and not only to incarnate it but to endow it with something of the appeal and power of endless life.

Take a character — or the shadow of a character — like Mr. F.'s Aunt. Why is she immortal? Why do we feel a great pity stirring within us for the occasional wretch who sees in her nothing but an

irrelevant parrot? I am less disposed to answer the question than to remind my reader of the fact. If he will tell me why a very clever boy of my acquaintance once lifted his hand in the school-room to attract his teacher's eye, and on being asked what he wanted simply answered, "There's milestones on the Dover road," we shall perhaps be upon the trail of a reason. I knew this boy after he had come up to the University and developed marked mathematical ability. Few men of his day in college showed greater capacity for consecutive thought; none perhaps had higher respect for reason and its exercise; none certainly felt more keenly the appeal of this inspired phantom of Dickens's brain, or would have known a more genuine delight had a stranger stopped him on the street to remark, "When we lived at Henley, Barnes's gander was stole by tinkers."

So I chanced once to see an undertaker making his final preparations for a funeral service which was to be performed an hour or two later. The body of a singularly beautiful young girl, an only child, arrayed for burial, lay upon a bier of somewhat unusual design and of great costliness. The circumstances of seemingly blighted promise and bitter loss were such as might have impressed the most careless. Even this man of many funerals seemed touched to more than professional sympathy. While we were alone for a few minutes I saw him approach the bier, lay his hand almost reverently upon its elaborate side and murmur more to himself than to

me, "Beautiful thing! beautiful thing!" The note of subdued ecstasy was real, and I knew that I beheld a reincarnation of Mr. Mould. It is safe to say that every genuinely interested observer of life who is glad to take account not merely of its background of mystery, its interplay of good and evil passion, and its ultimate subjection to law, but also of its surface incongruities and irrelevancies, will find his experiences prefigured by Dickens more often than by any other master of English speech. In this respect he is the supreme realist, and one reason why children respond so quickly to him is that he possesses precisely their faculty for seizing quickly upon salient features of the people he sees and focussing attention upon them. Let it be granted that these are not always the most significant features and that he sometimes errs in over-emphasizing them; as, for instance, when he makes far too much in "Great Expectations" of Jaggers's habitual biting of his big forefinger. None the less this is a feature of his intense realization of his world, where he lives with all a child's exuberance of vitality.

This same characteristic explains to a considerable degree the lack of restraint in his pathos. No apology is to be made for the bad blank verse in which he sings the elegies of little Nell or Paul Dombey; any more than it is to be denied that elements of genuine pathos appear in both cases. The difficulty is that, child-fashion, he permits his sense of tears to feed upon itself until the exaggeration repels us.

Even this exaggeration, however, although all too often it crosses the borders of melodrama, and though Dickens himself, it is to be feared, gave melodramatic emphasis to it in his readings, contains a positive and vital element. Its naïveté consists in a love of thorough-going experience. Grief is not hinted at; it is brought home to the heart, enlarged upon and made much of with all a child's unreserve and lack of sense of proportion. Hence it is that the pathos of Dickens which makes appeal to adults, most often appears in such passages as that in "Great Expectations" which shows Pip spelling out the inscriptions upon the tomb-stones of his parents, and building upon their conjectured meanings his childish theories of life, death, and loneliness; or in the account of David Copperfield's sense of mingled grief and importance after being told of his mother's death.

The essential cleanness of Dickens needs but a passing reference, because it is so obvious. He knew life in its vicious and criminal aspects well enough; in Oliver Twist his chief object was to depict it, partly perhaps in protest against the prevailing vogue of the rogue-novel, but more out of sympathy with unfortunates of Oliver's class. Here the work-house boy, the blundering and heartless parish authorities, the pickpocket, the burglar, and the harlot appear for what they are; yet, as in the case of the betrayal of Em'ly, or the sin of Lady Dedlock, there is a certain dignity of restraint about it all

which is the more effective because it is natural to the point of unconsciousness. Dickens never feared to call a spade a spade, — he was as far as man might be from prudishness; coarseness, indeed, was by no means impossible to him, — but in the essentials and fundamentals of decency he was sound. Nowhere do we find him guilty of that Pharisaism which in the name of art makes its bid for popularity by pandering to unworthy curiosity.

He had an appetite for life and its story which sometimes betrayed him into a sort of artistic gluttony, but in itself the appetite was wholesome; for that perversion of faculty which we have come to call decadent he had no taste at all. Recognizing sin and sorrow for what they were, he exaggerated the place of neither, though doubtless over-elaborating his treatment of the latter; but even were it true that he sometimes "wallowed naked in the pathetic," the question would still remain as to whether this unseemliness be not preferable, from the standpoint both of art and health, to the mud-bath of frenetic passion which so many of the later realists have offered to us.

This is not the place to discuss the artistic status of the novel with a purpose; nor is it needful to say much about Dickens as a practical reformer; suffice it to remark that the highest fiction will always differentiate itself from the mere essay in 'local colour,' not only by depicting but by interpreting life, precisely as portrait-painting will refuse to be con-

tent with the exact but momentary transcript which the camera supplies; and wherever the element of interpretation appears there the idea of purpose is at least implied. Only where this idea becomes so masterful as to dominate the whole work, dictating its scheme, arbitrarily selecting its material, and determining beforehand its result, does it prove to be an artistic blemish. In "Hard Times" Dickens permits this to happen in such degree as to make a tract of what should have been a novel, with the result that the book is perhaps the least readable of any that he wrote. But generally speaking the moral of his work is vital rather than homiletic: it issues naturally from the picture of life as a whole, instead of appearing as an ulterior motive; and though often frankly acknowledged, it is rarely permitted to tyrannize over the situation to the exclusion of humane and common charity. "Nicholas Nickleby" was fatal to some of the cheap Yorkshire schools. But Dickens was not upon a mere crusade; he could stop to paint the most delectable of madmen tossing his tribute of vegetable marrows to Mrs. Nickleby over the garden wall. "Martin Chuzzlewit" found a fair target for satire in the hypocrisy of British Philistinism and the bombastic crudity of life in America; but it also gave us in Sarah Gamp the sister of Falstaff. "Dombey and Son" contains a sermon — not too skilfully developed — against self-centred pride; but its faults in construction are all forgiven as soon as those im-

mortal mariners, Cap'n Cuttle and Jack Bunsby, with the redoubtable MacStinger, lift up their voices in its cause. The hypercritical tell us that these creatures are out of character and impossible; to which the answer is ready that Mrs. MacStinger haling her offending offspring into another room, whence speedily issue "sounds as of applause," is as perfect an incarnation of one sort of parental discipline as Cuttle and Bunsby are of a corresponding type of marine simplicity. "Bleak House" and "Little Dorrit" dealt a memorable blow at Circumlocution Offices and the injustice for which the Marshalsea stood; they pass, but Mr. F.'s Aunt and the Milestones on the Dover Road abide.

These are in one sense only incidental features of Dickens's work; but, like the postscripts and parentheses in our letters, they contain some of his most significant matter. In them there speaks his keen sense of both the variety and the puzzle of existence, chastened and sweetened by an unwavering faith that he who plays the man will ultimately justify his life to himself and to the world. He gives added illustration to the fundamentals of Christ's Gospel. The law of love, unpretentiously applied, fits man's need like wholesome bread. After making every allowance for the artistic shortcomings of such figures as the Cheerybles, the converted Scrooge, or Joe Gargery, — though I am personally sorry for the critic who can find fault with Joe, — the fact remains that they ex-

emplify in unmistakable fashion the great principles of the art of living together. They illustrate the spirit of mutual service; and it is to be noted that their very faults are the faults of exuberant vitality. They, like most of Dickens's characters, are so full of life as occasionally to run over; whatever else may be charged to their account, they are not meagre. Never did a man stretch out both hands to the fire of life with greater zest; and so far from elbowing less happily situated mortals away, probably no man of his century did more to extend the hearth and the glow. The practical beneficence of his work is written upon the pages of our statute books and in the increased humanity of our treatment of children and the poor; his essential cleanness of purpose and method in dealing with vice or crime shines out in refreshing contrast to the theory that, in order to abate a nuisance, one must first wallow in it; and the freshness of his approach to life, which age might temper but could not stale, speaks of the heart of a child that beat in him. He kept into manhood's estate and introduced into his work a thousand childish faults; but no less truly did he first learn and then teach the fundamental law of the Kingdom of Heaven.

An interesting and significant study might be made of Thackeray's use of Scripture language in his great scenes. Here for instance is a paragraph

from the famous return of Esmond. Lady Castlewood speaks.

"'And to-day, Henry, in the anthem, when they sang it, "When the Lord turned the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream," I thought, yes, like them that dream — them that dream. And then it went, "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy; and he that goeth forth and weepeth shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him"; I looked up from the book and saw you. I was not surprised when I saw you. I knew you would come, my dear, and saw the gold sunshine round your head.'

"She smiled an almost wild smile as she looked up at him. The moon was up by this time, glittering keen in the frosty sky. He could see, for the first time now clearly, her sweet careworn face.

"'Do you know what day it is?' she continued. 'It is the 29th of December — it is your birthday! But last year we did not drink it — no, no. My lord was cold, and my Harry was likely to die; and my brain was in a fever; and we had no wine. But now — now you are come again, bringing your sheaves with you, my dear.' She burst into a wild flood of weeping as she spoke: she laughed and sobbed on the young man's heart, crying out wildly, 'Bringing your sheaves with you — your sheaves with you!'"

A moving passage, and composed with an art worthy of the deep feeling which animated it. The language in its grace and simplicity harmonizes with the words of the Psalter, which, in their turn,

express as no other speech has ever been able to do the autumn mingling of joy and tears at the close of a great chapter in the soul's experience. It is moreover a passage to be earnestly commended to such as are tempted to call Thackeray a cynic; for it is eminently characteristic of his conclusions at the end of the play, and scarcely less of the means which he uses to present and define the players. This indebtedness of his to the language of religion is not generally appreciated, though but a moment's thought is needed to show how great it was. The "Adventures of Philip on His Way through the World," for instance, is in its very title an echo of the Parable of the Good Samaritan, since it is to show "Who robbed him, Who helped him, and Who passed him by"; and the preacher is always recurring to his text, as for instance in the character of the lodging-house keeper, Madame Smolensk, just returned from bearing Charlotte's message to the despairing hero.

"How brisk she is! How good-natured! How she smiles! How she speaks to all her company, and carves for her guests! You do not suppose she has no griefs and cares of her own? You know better. I dare say she is thinking of her creditors; of her poverty; of that accepted bill which will come due next week, and so forth. The Samaritan who rescues you, most likely, has been robbed and has bled in his day, and it is a wounded arm that bandages yours when bleeding." [1]

[1] *Adventures of Philip*, part ii, chap. ii.

These illustrations are characteristic rather than exceptional. The title of "Vanity Fair" is taken from the most widely read religious volume in English next to the Bible, while its motto and refrain is from the Bible itself. "Vanity of vanities," cries this modern preacher as insistently as Koheleth of old. But they are a short-sighted crew who see in his use of the text nothing but Koheleth's cynicism. As though he foresaw the public's blindness, Thackeray explicitly confessed his apostolic purpose to his mother: "What I want is to make a set of people living without God in the world (only that is a cant phrase)." How well he succeeded let Lord Steyne, Sir Pitt Crawley, poor stupid Jos Sedley, old Major Pendennis, and the immortal Becky answer in their different ways. No unfair advantage of his words is taken in saying that Thackeray's aim was to translate the Apostle's statement into terms of Stuart and Georgian English, and to show that to be without God was to be without hope in the eighteenth or nineteenth century as truly as in the first. In the case of "Catherine," as I have already indicated, he proclaimed this as from a pulpit; in "Vanity Fair," when his art had perfected itself, he was better content to let it remain implicit; but after such a manner as to make it bone of his history's bone and flesh of its flesh. In their different ways, Pendennis praying by his dying mother, Colonel Newcome with his memorable *Adsum*, and old Baron-

ess Bernstein, in whom one can just discern the splendid Beatrix of other days, take up the parable and point the inevitable moral.

But I incline to believe that Thackeray's debt to religion and the religious significance of his work are both to be sought a little deeper beneath the surface, rich though the surface be. He is perhaps the most truly epic of English prose-writers and therefore the most sincerely pathetic. To call him a cynic is so completely to miss his secret that no time need be wasted in exposing the shallowness of such criticism. He was as cynical as a boy who under stress of strong emotion must needs assume a nonchalant manner or else give way to tears. Like most men of deep feeling, he shrank from its display lest it might master and make a spectacle of him. But none the less, through what I have termed the epic quality in his picture of life, his feeling calls to ours as deep to deep.

There is an almost Homeric, certainly a Virgilian, amplitude to his art. Without crowding his canvas or his stage with characters as Dickens sometimes does, he represents them in the scope and range of their lives rather than in the light of an episode or a series of episodes. If they are sowing he looks upon them with the eye of a painter of harvests. Through all the follies of Pendennis one seems to catch glimpses of the day when he shall kneel in tears by his mother's bedside. The cleverness of Becky is equal to most of life's exigencies, but

it cannot avail to fend off the time when her angry husband shall strip her of her jewels and fling them in Lord Steyne's face. The jaded Bernstein eyes leer at us now and then behind the glorious front of Beatrix, as though they were the ultimate reality and the beauty but a mask. The selfishness and treachery of Catherine are evidently busy in preparation for the night of terror when she shall be confronted by the countenance of her murdered husband; while the pride and passion of Philip move toward a final reckoning with life which shall bring him to his knees in thanksgiving for a very simple act of kindness, and show him to be a truer man in his humility than he had been in his self-confidence.

It is in the light of such judgements that the creator sees his creatures, and it is toward such issues that their careers inevitably move; meanwhile, if he call them puppets and picture two children packing them away at the story's end because the play is played out,[1] that is only his way of half concealing a poignant sense of the certain mystery and the seeming fatuity of much that men busy themselves about under the impression that it is life. How far he was from regarding his greater characters as puppets is evidenced by such a meeting as that with Lowell when he was completing the Newcomes.

"'Come into Evans's,' said he, 'and I'll tell you all about it. *I have killed the Colonel.*' So they

[1] Cf. Thackeray's tailpiece to *Vanity Fair*.

walked in [says Mr. F. H. Underwood], and took a table in a remote corner, and then Thackeray, drawing the fresh sheets of MS. from his breast pocket, read through that exquisitely touching chapter which records the death of Colonel Newcome. When he came to the final *Adsum*, the tears which had been swelling his lids for some time trickled down his face, and the last word was almost an inarticulate sob."[1]

I hesitate to set this down for fear some ill-advised reader may leap to the conclusion that Thackeray is then to be numbered among the sentimentalists. He was as far from sentimentality as from cynicism: but he did feel to the full the pathos of common life; and the action of his greater novels always demands time enough to distinguish the end of an experience from its beginning. Both the humour and pathos of Dickens are lush and full of sap; the exuberance of May and June is in them and they infect us with the exhilaration of early summer. Thackeray's season is rather a harvest time which tells us that not every bud of the expectant spring has come to fruition. His story is told from the standpoint of its last chapter; sometimes, we might almost say, from the last chapter of a sequel, so well did he love to carry his characters on through the term of their natural lives. A realist indeed he was, as Professor Cross has happily called him, a "realist of the Spirit," who dwells much upon the great human experiences of "pardon, renunciation, for-

[1] Article on J. R. Lowell, *Harper's Magazine*, vol. xii, pp. 265-266.

giveness, reconciliation, disinterested friendship, and the separation of parents and children by sea and death; and bows his head in awe before the inexplicable course of events and the mysteries of life and death."[1] The conclusion of the matter is that amid all the selfishness, meanness, and contradiction of life, as well as in its mystery, faith, hope, and love abide; and that the greatest of these is love.[2]

One great name remains to be dealt with in this chapter. But before I pass on to George Eliot confession must needs be made of the embarrassment of riches occasioned by the memory of Disraeli, Bulwer-Lytton, Mrs. Gaskell, Charles and Henry Kingsley, Charles Reade, and Anthony Trollope; to whose names should perhaps be added that of Mrs. Beecher Stowe. It has become the fashion in certain quarters to treat this mid-century fiction

[1] W. L. Cross, *The Development of the English Novel*, p. 206.

[2] Had space sufficed, I should have tried to say something of Thackeray's illustrations and the influence that they have had in fostering the popular notion of his cynicism. Admirably fitted as his drawings are to the purposes of burlesque, they unquestionably detract from the consistency of his greater works. Almost always sane and self-restrained in the use of his pen, he can out-Dickens Dickens in extravagance when he takes his pencil. One would not of course lightly give up the tailpiece to *Vanity Fair*, or "Venus preparing the Arms of Mars"; and if Thackeray had confined himself to depicting the charms of Peggy O'Dowd all might have been well; but the caricatures — for they are nothing more — of Beatrix, Laura, and even Becky Sharp, are a heavy price to pay for them. The late Mr. Shorthouse has dealt with the matter fairly though by no means exhaustively, in his article entitled "The Humourous in Literature," *Macmillan's Magazine*, vol. xlvii.

cavalierly, and to assume that we have outgrown it. Assumption is a necessity if we are to be supercilious, since proof is, and is likely to remain, wanting. The group is a very notable one and contains some figures of real significance to our present purpose; a fact which makes it the more difficult to accord them but a paragraph apiece. Bulwer-Lytton and Disraeli, to be sure, do not greatly concern us; though any one who will blow the dust from "Pelham" may discern at a glance one characteristic which distinguishes the earlier work of its author from that of his greater contemporaries and assigns it at once to an inferior rank. The hero tells his story in two sentences: "Before that time, the little ability I possessed only led me into acts which I fear, most benevolent reader, thou hast already sufficiently condemned; my good feelings — for I was not naturally bad — never availed me the least when present temptation came into my way. I had no guide but passion; no rule but the impulse of the moment." [1]

Of course all this misrule of passion is frowned upon in the proper places, and duly pronounced to be naughty. A pinch of incense to Mrs. Grundy is a part of the game; but the game's essence is the melodrama and mock-heroics of lawlessness. It is not great and terrible revolt, like that of Milton's Satan or Shelley's Prometheus, but dandiacal and Byronesque. The reader feels the aptness of Long-

[1] *Pelham*, chap. xxxvii.

fellow's comment upon "The Caxtons": "The style produces upon me the effect of a flashy waistcoat festooned with gold chains." The passion is thin and the worldly-wisdom sophomoric. Hence, since self-control is essential to manhood, these heroes of the twilight prove to be like Falstaff's men in buckram — they find the day unwholesome and do not last. It should of course be noted that Bulwer-Lytton in some respects outgrew his foppishness, and that his later are also his better works. The posthumous Kenelm Chillingly is, like Pelham, conscious of the footlights and the gallery; but there is man-stuff in him.

It was Mrs. Gaskell's lot to deserve, and in considerable measure to win, the sympathy and affection of her day. Since that day a more genuine homage has been paid to her novels by the critics than by the public. "Cranford" has, to be sure, become a household word, but "Mary Barton" is to most of us only a dim and uncertain name. Yet it remains a name worth entering upon one's list of friends; for though the book is somewhat crude in places, it has humanity, beauty, force, and plot enough to ensure a good old age. Mrs. Gaskell could scarcely have written it but for her experience as a clergyman's wife in the manufacturing districts; nor could she have made the book appeal as it did to the public of Cobden's day, had it not been for the genuinely prophetic note in her descriptions of the poor — their sufferings, their patience, their charity, and their passion.

Charles Kingsley should by rights have a chapter to himself, and give his brother Henry a generous page in it. The rectory at Eversley will long continue to be a place of pilgrimage to many who are by no means blind to Kingsley's notable limitations and outstanding faults. But those who go ought not to forget that here Henry wrote the "Recollections of Geoffrey Hamlyn." If the story be still unknown to them, they should return thanks for a happiness yet in store; and when they find the book, look for its fellow, "Ravenshoe," as well.

Charles Kingsley doubtless thought of himself, and has been regarded by most of his admirers, as an essentially virile person. The judgement is a just one. But there is a nemesis waiting upon manliness which condemns it, as soon as it comes to be pursued for its own sake and sought as though it were an entity, to a measure of deterioration. The virility upon which men pride themselves and of which they boast is more often than not touched with a subtle taint of effeminacy. This is not the effeminacy of softness or lack of fibre; but rather that of shrillness and the impulse to jump to a conclusion without calculating the distance. The fault — if fault it be — is a generous rather than a mean one, since the impulse of which it is an expression is the secret of woman's frequent efficiency and occasional absurdity as a reformer.

Kingsley's nature was warm and rich. Emo-

tional in the best sense, rather than logical, he hated sentimentality honestly enough in theory and sometimes betrayed himself into it in practice. But his instincts were generally true, and at a certain period of masculine development he often exercises an influence over young men as profound as it is wholesome. They like him the better for his prejudices and his exuberant vitality; indeed, some of them in after life find the remnants of a grudge against Cardinal Newman abiding in their hearts for his infliction of such condign punishment upon Kingsley's ill-advised attack; though on the other hand some incidental credit ought to accrue to the victim as the unwilling occasion of the enrichment of English literature by the "Apologia."

A country parson, devoted to the service of his people in things physical as well as spiritual, and keenly alive to the social problems pressing for solution in town and country both; an amateur of considerable distinction in science, and a sincere lover of outdoor life and rural sports, Kingsley attempted to fuse all these interests in his books. The fire of his zeal was hot enough to effect a sort of amalgamation, but his patience was scarcely equal to the perfection of any highly artistic design.

"Yeast" dealt with conditions among agricultural labourers, and "Alton Locke" with the corresponding situation in the towns, after a fashion which fascinated while it shocked and en-

raged the complacent middle class. Both are too formless, and too distinctly tracts for the time, to maintain the place in literature to which their genuine literary quality might otherwise entitle them. Like all Kingsley's work they are essentially and fundamentally religious. He was never more a teacher and preacher of religion than when he took up a pen. He was a Broad Churchman, too, in something better than a technical sense. His influence was due in good measure to a conviction that Christianity was capable of application to every need and phase of human life. In his earlier books he aimed to translate it into terms of what would now be called sociology; in "Hypatia" he dealt with the religious doubts which had played so large a part in his own mental and spiritual development, and with certain dangers of ecclesiasticism. "Westward Ho!" set forth the elements of loyalty, courage, humility, and outspoken piety which seemed to him needful to the making of a man; and however open to criticism these two books may be in respect of form and historical setting, their right to a high place in the literature of their day is not to be gainsaid; so human is their interest, so perennially vital are the problems with which they concern themselves, and so genuine is their literary distinction.

Of "Two Years Ago" one cannot speak quite so positively. More than twenty have elapsed since I read and reread it in college. Its imperfec-

tions in structure show clearer now than then; but something of the charm of wholesome outdoor life which cholera could not taint, and the general goodwill which even hopeless misapprehension of the issue between North and South in America could not embitter, survives them. It seems a good book still, whose characters live and whose thews and sinews are yet sound, even though Tom Thurnall be not quite so masterful as of yore. As in "Hereward," "Glaucus," "The Water-Babies," and the memorable songs, — which in form approach perfection more nearly than anything else their author ever did, — one of its chief characteristics appears to be a fundamentally religious tone. Kingsley's place in literature is due in no small measure to his appreciation of the vitality and significance of religion; for as Professor Masson has put it, "There is not one of his novels which has not the power of Christianity for its theme."

Charles Reade is not particularly significant for this discussion, nor, with the probable exception of "The Cloister and the Hearth," does his work seem likely to advance any very sound title to remembrance; but Anthony Trollope could not be thus summarily dismissed even if he had less claim upon the writer's affectionate gratitude. I believe there are some people who do not care for Trollope, and in whom the mention of "Framley Parsonage" wakes no responsive thrill. Indeed, one of the few disappointing letters in Professor Maitland's admi-

rable life of Sir Leslie Stephen is that in which confession is made to Mr. Norton that Trollope grew dull in Sir Leslie's last years. Much may, however, be forgiven the critic in this time of his weakness, for he had loved much in the day of his power. Trollope's work is probably the best example in our literature of what I may call the incidental debt of fiction to religion. Though essentially reverent, he was far from being what is commonly known as 'pious.' Had you called him so, he would almost indubitably have sworn at you, for he had sad gifts in that direction which ought to have made him interesting to Sir Leslie Stephen even to the end; but no man of his own rank in English letters ever drew so extensively or so profitably upon the Church for his material. The group of stories included between "The Warden" and the "Last Chronicle of Barset" represent one of the most notable contributions to the literature of manners made by any author, in any language or in any age. The wonder of it grows in view of Trollope's procrustean methods of composition, which condensed, or more often expanded, the day's story to the limits of so many words in so many hours; and it is further heightened as we remember that he had no extended circle of clerical acquaintances. The Bishop and Mrs. Proudie, Archdeacon Grantley, the Warden, the inmates of Framley Parsonage, and even the ineffable Slope, were all creatures of his imagination. But Trollope's fancy in certain reaches of its play was almost as

11625

circumstantial as Defoe's. He had inherited a faculty for observation from his mother; he had travelled considerably, and upon what may be termed distinctly middle-class errands; he understood men, and reasoned logically enough that the black coat of the parson clothed human nature not essentially different from that sheltered by his own favourite pink. He was neither cynical nor sentimental; he neither soared nor sank; demigods and reprobates were equally out of his range. He moved upon —

> The level of every day's
> Most quiet need, by sun and candle light.

But he moved there with a very sure and confident step, at the bidding of a true creative instinct; and he treated his characters with an admirable even-handedness which is one of the most desirable as it is one of the rarest embodiments of charity. It is easy to sneer at his ideal of morality as Philistine; but it is idle and silly to do so simply because in the large sense that ideal is sound, wholesome, and fitted to human need. His Grantleys and Proudies not only amuse but instruct us with their picture of the overgrowth of worldliness, sometimes merely petty and sometimes mordant and corrupting, upon natures that mean to be as honourable as they certainly are narrow. His "Three Clerks," though by no means great figures, yet offer a highly significant object-lesson of the worth to life of loyalty, veracity, and trustworthiness — especially in the matter of

other people's money. "Framley Parsonage" is far from being a startling tale; no moving incidents by flood or field enliven it; but it is not therefore a dull book; nor will it be while the 'domestic virtues,' toward which contemporary fiction chooses to be so patronizing, have significance for us. Let us grant that it is plain prose. In the same breath we must admit that it is good prose, worth writing, and bound to be worth reading so long as it shall concern one generation to know how its predecessors lived.

Trollope, then, not only relates himself to institutional religion by drawing his most notable characters from its service; he shows a more intimate kinship to its spirit in the ethical tone which pervades his work. The moral is rarely obtruded; it is never absent.

No writer of English fiction — certainly no writer of the first rank — is more distinctly and confessedly the historian of conscience than George Eliot. Wordsworth's "Ode to Duty" might well serve as headpiece to her collected works. The theory might conceivably be defended that her emphasis upon ethical problems was due, at least in part, to her departures from evangelical orthodoxy and the formal irregularity of her relation to G. H. Lewes. She had been of a strait sect. She was convinced of the fundamental connection between ethics and religion. Following, even in her most heterodox days, the general bent of her youth, she was concerned to show that a change of views such as she had experienced

in no way invalidated the essential appeal of religion or the soundness of moral life. She illustrates again a truth as old as Socrates and St. Paul, that those who are accused of corrupting youth have sometimes the deepest concern with morality, and those who break with the formal faith of the fathers have often the liveliest sense of religion. It is by no means a universal truth and may easily be put to base uses; but, such as it is, George Eliot exemplified it.

With her the era of the 'serious person' in fiction may be said fairly to have begun. Scott, Dickens, and Thackeray had been serious writers in all good conscience; yet they had treated their art with a sort of masterful gaiety; a profession of letters they might have recognized — scarcely a profession of fiction-writing. With George Eliot men and women began to realize that the writing of novels was a very grave business. Literatures must be ransacked for the sake of "Romola"; Spain visited that "The Spanish Gypsy" might have her due; Sugden pored over and Mr. Frederic Harrison consulted that the law of "Felix Holt" might prove impeccable. It was all very well; I suppose that it was all inevitable; but it was none the less a pity: because the fact is that when the canons of an art are all discovered and its very bye-laws codified, the art itself materializes into a craft. The work of the craftsman may easily be superior in detail to that of the artist; but there remains this distinction, that art is the expression of a person, and so far forth its pro-

duct is related immediately to life's ultimate and indefinable sources; the product of the craft, however highly wrought and useful, is always a mediate and derived thing, relating itself primarily to a rule rather than to a soul. How true this is will be abundantly illustrated in a later chapter, where we shall find busy little men sweating over the details of 'local colour' on the one hand, or, on the other, rushing into artificial extravagances in the vain hope of establishing their originality. They only advertise their bondage, the one by his acquiescence, the other by his revolt.

I am not prepared to say that the cloud which obscured the religious faith of Marian Evans is accountable for the somewhat stilted nature of George Eliot's later books. It is a quality not easy to define; but for lack of a better term I must call it feebleness of life. Her men and women are cast in a sufficiently generous mould; she does not stint them in body or in mind; but circumstances seem to thrust them too easily into the background, where they are in danger of being mistaken for automata. Their life is thin, and none the less thin when passionate. This does not appear in the "Scenes from Clerical Life," "Adam Bede," or "Silas Marner," as in "Romola." Nor for me is it so oppressive even in "Middlemarch" as in the "Mill on the Floss."

But I do venture the conjecture that the religious experience through which she passed affected her sense of humour. This was less by way of extinc-

tion, which in her case was fortunately impossible, than by way of limitation. George Eliot was a great humourist; but the reader may safely challenge any student of her works to cite a half-dozen humourous incidents in them. She was mistress of the humourous phrase and the clever apothegm, as Mrs. Poyser, Mrs. Cadwallader, and Miss Priscilla Lammeter[1] shall long live to testify. In the handling of her choruses, like the rustic gathering in the bar of the Rainbow, or the onlookers at Squire Cass's New Year ball in "Silas Marner," the humourous incident appears for a moment, but only realizes itself as a setting for comment upon life.

However this may be, there is no accounting for George Eliot except upon the ground of her religious experience, Evangelical, Unitarian, and Comtist. The most casual acquaintance with her work is sufficient to show her large dependence for material upon the characters and problems of religion. The titles of "Scenes from Clerical Life" and "Janet's Repentance," which brought her into fame, are significant. Dinah, the Methodist preacher, is the heroine, if not indeed the central figure, of "Adam Bede." Savonarola is to be held accountable for

[1] Priscilla's humour does not of course compare in volume with Mrs. Poyser's; but its quality is every whit as good. She is bound to stay upon the farm with her father, for if anything turns out wrong, as it can't "but do in these times, there's nothing kills a man so soon as having nobody to find fault with but himself." She must also keep up her herd of cows, inasmuch as "there's nothing like a dairy if folks want a bit o' worrit to make the days pass."

"Romola," since it was the Florence of his day that she set herself with painful conscientiousness to depict. No one does more to redeem "Felix Holt" from failure than the Rev. Rufus Lyon, nor to enliven the somewhat sombre landscape of "Middlemarch" than the sprightly Mrs. Cadwallader. Nor is this constant reference to the official representatives of religion a mere superficial accident. The problems of her novels are preëminently problems of the soul. Janet 'finds herself' through the influence of the Evangelical Tryan. The story of "Silas Marner" is a narrative of restoration to faith and therefore to life. The old weaver's heart, which had been withering into insensibility under the influences of injustice, misunderstanding, neglect, and selfishness, becomes again as the heart of a little child under the burden and the joy of Eppie's adoption. The sermon of Dinah on the village common might have been a veritable utterance of George Eliot's Methodist aunt had there been any need to look abroad for it. In point of fact it was her own in a deeper sense than almost anything she ever wrote; produced, as she has told us, with tears, and representative in the highest degree of her deep religious nature and her keen homiletic instinct.

Parallel to these questions of religious faith, which find such large place in the studies of Janet, Dinah, and Silas Marner, move the great ethical problems from which they can never long be separated. These latter may almost be said to represent the bulk of

George Eliot's work. They appear in the relations of Donnithorne and Hetty; in the duplicity of Godfrey Cass — if duplicity be not too harsh a term for the concealment of one unworthy and unfortunate rather than criminal episode in a generally upright life; in the progress of Romola toward self-knowledge, and in that of Tito toward self-conviction; as well as in the remarkable embodiment of hypocrisy, half-premeditated, half-unconscious, in Bulstrode. Whatever may be said of George Eliot's failure to retain faith in any formulated doctrine of grace, there can be no question of her grasp upon a doctrine of judgement. No greater exemplar of the so-called Nonconformist conscience ever lived and wrote. It is quite true that she insisted upon her privilege and obligation to distinguish between the conventional and the fundamentally ethical. She was by no means insensitive to criticism of her relation with Lewes, as the letter to Mrs. Bray in which such emphasis is laid upon her own view of it as a real and sacred marriage remains to testify. Yet she was no mere contemner of convention, as was shown by her regular marriage to Mr. Cross and the consequent wrath of those whom Mr. Jeaffreson calls the "extreme Shelleyan Socialists." However these episodes in her experience may be interpreted, the fact remains that no writer of the first rank has more insistently or ably rung the changes upon the great ethical principle of Christianity, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

One other characteristic of George Eliot's work in fiction which relates it closely to religion is her appreciation of the worth of common life and her keen sense of its pathos and mystery. Her best work is provincial. She is most at home when describing commonplace, middle-class people with the humbler folk who surround them; and her knowledge of their life was thorough enough to render this description immune from the contagion of cheap contempt and shallow cynicism. In literature as in religion contempt is usually a product of disease. The work which embodies it, however clever it may seem for the moment, is marked for early death. I am aware that Swift may be quoted against me here; so may Lucretius; but in the *sæva indignatio* of such genius there are positive elements capable of survival, despite the worst that the malignant influences of contempt can do. The people of George Eliot's villages and provincial towns may lead limited lives, but they move nevertheless in a large world.

"'Ah [says Dolly gravely to Silas, wondering whence Eppie could have come to him], ah, it's like the night and the morning, and the sleeping and the waking, and the rain and the harvest — one goes and the other comes, and we know nothing how or where. We may strive and scrat and fend, but it's little we can do arter all — the big things come and go wi' no striving o' our'n — they do, that they do.'"[1]

[1] *Silas Marner*, chap. xiv.

It was in the same spirit that, in a letter to Blackwood, George Eliot exhorted him to open his eyes to the poetry and pathos, the tragedy and comedy of common life, and it was characteristic of her that "Middlemarch" should end with such a confession of faith as the following: "That things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life and rest in unvisited tombs."[1]

Later writers are not lacking in this same sense of mystery and pathos; they have too often striven for distinction, however, by treating it, as Sir Leslie Stephen has somewhere said, either as a grievance which can be summarily removed, or as an opportunity for exhibiting their own sensibility. George Eliot did neither. She recognized grievances to be removed, and in "Felix Holt" came perilously near writing a three-volume tract upon them. She possessed sensibility and may occasionally have indulged it. But she did not rail at fate or treat life as an evil. On the contrary, she everywhere recognizes the need of some generous coördinating principle, if it is to be quite sane or wholesome. The instinct which kept her from proselyting in the name of 'rationalism' was therefore a true one, inasmuch as it warned her that to pull out a main prop of life without putting some equivalent stay

[1] These two passages are set in a similar relation by Mr. Herbert Paul in his *Stray Leaves*, p. 43. His essay upon George Eliot in that volume is especially notable for its appreciation of *Middlemarch*.

in its place was an essentially irrational proceeding. Whether Evangelical or Positivist, she remained in some real sense religious and was always the apostle of some gospel or other. The distinctively Christian note is often in abeyance, as she held it honestly in abeyance in her experience; but none the less it remains the subject of a sort of wistful concern to her and to her characters, as though it were meant for life and only the disjointed times kept life from claiming it.

Dolly Winthrop and Silas sum the matter up in their last conversation.

"'I shall never know [says the latter, referring to the false accusation brought against him many years before] whether they got at the truth o' the robbery. . . It 's dark to me, Mrs. Winthrop, that is; I doubt it 'll be dark to the last.'

"'Well, yes, Master Marner,' said Dolly, who sat with a placid listening face, now bordered by grey hairs; 'I doubt it may. It 's the will o' Them above as a many things should be dark to us; but there 's some things as I 've never felt i' the dark about, and they 're mostly what comes i' the day's work. You were hard done by that once, Master Marner, and it seems as you 'll never know the rights of it; but that does n't hinder there *being* a rights, Master Marner, for all it 's dark to you and me.'

"'No,' said Silas, 'no; that does n't hinder. Since the time the child was sent to me and I 've come to love her as myself, I 've had light enough to trusten by; and now she says she 'll never leave me. I think I shall trusten till I die.'"

CHAPTER X

THE NEW RADICALISM

"Some day," wrote Sir Leslie Stephen to Mr. C. E. Norton, in 1889, "I shall remark upon the extraordinary phenomenon that Mill and Newman and Carlyle all lived in the same century."[1] It is a tribute to the intellectual wealth of the early Victorian decades, which might have been enhanced by the inclusion of Ruskin in the group; since in spite of his relation to Carlyle he represents a fourth line of influence. The connection of Newman and Ruskin with the Evangelicals has already been noted, together with Carlyle's temporary purpose to prepare himself for the Presbyterian ministry. James Mill not only entertained such a purpose but accomplished it. Though a shoemaker's son, he became an excellent scholar, entered the pulpit, and maintained himself as a minister for several years. He seems, however, never to have had much heart for his profession, and by the time of his settlement in London in 1802 had already developed violent anti-religious prejudices which were destined to play a large part in the education

[1] *Life and Letters of Sir Leslie Stephen*, p. 397.

of his famous son. How much of James Mill's hostility to religion was due to the influence of Bentham may not now be determined. Bentham himself presents a figure full of self-contradiction, with his genuinely humane instincts, his just discontent with the shape of British jurisprudence, —

> If shape it might be called, that shape had none,

and his untiring efforts to give it form and real application to the people's needs; efforts which, as Mill said, "found the philosophy of law a chaos, and left it a science"; and at the same time his violent prejudices, his capacity for a sort of learned Billingsgate, his intolerance of all difference from his opinions, and his dogmatic denial of many things apparently upon the sole ground that they had not chanced to fall within the limits of his own experience. His Biblical criticism, though incompetent enough in other respects, has at least the merit of being humourous, since he numbers St. Luke among the twelve Apostles, and refers to Priscilla and Aquila as two female disciples of St. Paul.[1]

Beside him among the radical influences of the early century must be set Priestley and William Godwin. The former was a Presbyterian-Unitarian minister who suffered many things at the hands of the Birmingham mob, for the sake of what he believed to be his faith and what his enemies thought to be

[1] Benn, *History of English Rationalism in the Nineteenth Century*, vol. i, p. 302.

his lack of it. A consistent and valiant champion of the French Revolution, he was even elected a deputy to the National Convention; though he has become better known to later generations for his distinguished achievements as a chemist. A friend of Franklin, moreover, to whom he was indebted for aid in the preparation of his "History of Electricity," he carried all of Franklin's enlightened curiosity and impatience of mere tradition into chemical speculation and experiment. He has a good claim to first place in the new science which displaced the old phlogiston theories, and he disputes with Lavoisier the discovery of oxygen, while the Utilitarians are no less under obligation to him for their watchword, "The greatest happiness of the greatest number." He died in America in 1804, roundly denounced as an infidel by many of the orthodox, but "believing himself to hold the doctrines of the Primitive Christians, and looking for the second coming of Christ."

Godwin was a man of different type: one of those anarchists in theory who live an ill-ordered and half-parasitical, yet upon the whole a laborious and humdrum life; a radical of radicals, who would submit to the form of marriage with his first wife only for the sake of legitimizing their child, but who was mightily perturbed when the child herself a few years later ran away with Shelley, to make practical application of her father's theories. It is a question whether he ever quite forgave this evidence of dis-

cipleship, though some solace was to be found in the very considerable sums which he extracted from Shelley's complaisant purse. The pointing of a moral is no part of my purpose in this brief reference to Godwin's career; but a tale might be highly adorned by the lives and adventures of the group who made up his family after the second marriage. There were Fanny Imlay, the illegitimate child of his first wife, destined to die by her own hand some fifteen years later, and a month to the day after the suicide of Shelley's first wife; the daughter Mary, who, having been legitimized by the tardy marriage of her parents as above related, was herself by a yet tardier ceremony to become the second Mrs. Shelley; a daughter of Godwin's second wife by a former marriage, who in her turn, as Lord Byron's mistress and the mother of "Allegra," was to illustrate the family emancipation from conventionality; and William Godwin, Junior, the son of this second marriage and a youth of promise which was blighted by his death at the age of twenty-nine.[1]

Godwin has been characterized as "largely a blend of Micawber and Pecksniff," and there is some ground for the charge. Yet he had a kind of genius, as he showed a species of industry, and has entered into a sort of fame. Whether or not honesty

[1] The extraordinary composition of this group is noted by the writer of an excellent sketch of Godwin in Chambers' *Encyclopedia of English Literature*, vol. ii, p. 703. Cf. also, the rather dreary *Life* by Kegan Paul.

and benevolence of purpose admit of similar qualification I do not undertake to say; but there is no doubt that he did something to further the objects of the Utilitarians, as he may also have helped at once to propagate and mitigate the principles of the Revolution. A practical anarchist, in so far as he would have had the doctrine of *laissez faire* carried to its extreme conclusions, he yet was no advocate of violence. Agreeing on the other hand with Bentham in his utilitarian aim, he differed widely from him in respect of means; and it was not until Herbert Spencer's day that the two lines of influence represented by Bentham and Godwin were caught up and woven together.[1] Godwin too began life as a minister of religion, and preached with some degree of regularity for a half-dozen years. Later on he became, or thought that he became, an atheist; but under the influence of Coleridge he seems to have passed out of this region of denial into a somewhat misty theism. Yet even in the days of "Political Justice" he was able to rouse in young men an impulse that was close akin to the spirit of Christianity. "I had never before," said Crabb Robinson after reading it, "nor, I am afraid, have I ever since, felt so strongly the duty of not living to one's self, but of having for one's sole object the good of the community."[2]

[1] Benn, *History of English Rationalism in the Nineteenth Century*, vol. ii, pp. 206–207.

[2] *Reminiscences*, vol. i, chap. iii (1795). Robinson was equal, how-

Among the many assaults which so-called 'rationalism' makes upon the validity of religion, one is based upon its Protean character. Religion, these critics allege, faced with new obstacles, is always changing its form, realigning its battalions, zigzagging toward its goal when the straight path seems blocked. Such a writer as Mr. Benn, in his recent "History of English Rationalism," is almost as contemptuous of the willingness shown by progressive Christian teachers to welcome new scientific discoveries as he is toward the ultra-conservatives. The latter are obscurantists, theology's normal product; the former are pretenders whose charlatan facility in the Chinese art of 'saving one's face' is equally characteristic of the baneful tendency inseparable from religious thought and practice. The argument appears to be that revelation is, from its very nature, a fixed, complete, and stable sum of truth; that theology is really as incapable of growth as Macaulay represented it to be when he seated his New Zealander — long since become a prince of bores — upon a pier of London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St. Paul's; that a period of general scientific advance by which other regions of human experience profit must of necessity prove fatal to faith; and

ever, to distinguishing between Godwin the philosopher and Godwin the man of business. Some years later he was with Coleridge when Godwin and a certain Mr. Rough met for the first time. The next morning both called upon Robinson within an hour, each with the inquiry as to whether the other would be likely to lend him £50 *Ibid.*, chap. xv, Feb. 26, 1812, note.

that only another proof of ingrained clerical presumption and insincerity is given by those teachers of religion who maintain that older theologies were false only in so far as they were partial or dogmatic, that they took account of real experiences and answered to essential needs, and that the cry for a living God still sounds in the world, — that it is significant, that the attempt to answer it is worth while and can be made most effectively in terms of modern speech. The difficulty of the 'rationalist's' argument lies in its major premiss. His claim that revelation is incapable of development is not only open to contradiction, — it has been explicitly denied by the greatest Christian teachers. This denial was indeed a chief article in the faith of Christianity's Founder. According to the Christian tradition, He began his ministry with the assurance that the national religious expectation was in process of fulfilment, and therefore of advance and uplift to a higher stage. He ended it with the solemn promise that though it had become expedient for Him to go away, the Spirit whose exponent He had been would make his continued abode with believers, introducing them by degrees into all truth. Change, development, and capacity to make gain of new knowledge are of the essence of religion. In so far as Christianity exhibits these, it but attests its possession of the 'notes' of a genuine and lively faith. Religion may easily enough be marred and wounded, starved into grotesque forms of superstition or temporarily

excited into fanaticism, persecuted to apparent death in some isolated cases and buried in a tomb made doubly sure against resurrection. But it refuses to stay there. Grant it a generation in the grave and it only comes forth refreshed. The impatience of its enemies is justified, and the not infrequent note of petulance in Mr. Benn's interesting volumes ought therefore to be borne with a large charity. For the 'rationalist's' labor is Sisyphean; the one thing certain about it is that, however successful it may seem to-day, it will all have to be done over again to-morrow; upon no other field of conflict than that where men think to kill religion is it necessary so many times to slay the slain.

John Stuart Mill fell heir to a pretty consistent atheism. Bentham is commonly reckoned as an atheist, but there were fine inconsistencies in him which do much to humanize his life and something to mitigate his creed. With James Mill, however, the negation of belief seems to have hardened into a sort of dogmatism.[1] Few men of honourable life and very great intellectual gifts have ever left a more unlovely picture of themselves to posterity, and this in spite of the fact that we see him through the eyes of filial devotion. John Mill's admiration for his father seems to have been sec-

[1] I would not imply that he was dogmatic in his assertion of atheism, but only in his claim that nothing valid and significant can be known or believed in the realm of religion. Cf. J. S. Mill's *Autobiography*, chap. ii.

ond only to that which he had for his wife, and leads the reader of the "Autobiography" to question a little whether the same tendency to almost passionate exaggeration may not have coloured it. Yet posterity has much to thank James Mill for. It would be ungenerous to minimize the service to clear thought as well as to practical reform rendered by this most consistent and unpleasant of the Utilitarians; but it sinks into second place when compared with the daring experiment which he made in the education of his son. The opening pages of the "Autobiography" tell the story of a prodigy at once so fascinating and so abnormal as well-nigh to threaten even an experience-philosopher's disbelief in miracle. Few children can have been born into the world with purely intellectual endowments of a higher class than those of John Mill; none, it is safe to say, ever found greater demands made upon his powers during infancy. This picture of a boy beginning Greek at the age of three, and reading, before Latin was begun in his eighth year, Æsop, Xenophon's "Anabasis," "Cyropædia," and "Memorials of Socrates," the whole of Herodotus, with parts of Diogenes Laërtius, Lucian, and Isocrates; then passing on, at eight, to grapple with six dialogues of Plato, is as painful as it fortunately is unparalleled. "My father, in all his teaching," says the son, quite as much in gratitude as in criticism, "demanded of me not only the utmost that I could do, but much that I

could by no possibility have done." I have no space and as little need to remind the reader of the beginning of Latin and mathematics; the unremitted teaching of the younger children; the long list of grotesquely mature volumes read and reported upon to his father during their daily walks. It is an oft-repeated story; but the wonder grows. Amid it all two things are eminent by their absence, — the natural play of childhood and the equally normal and necessary speculations about, and constructive training in, the rudiments of religion. "I am thus," he tells us in a familiar passage of the "Autobiography," "one of the very few examples in this country of one who has not thrown off religious belief, but never had it."

This is the feature of John Stuart Mill's training that gives to the exercise of his great powers a peculiar interest for us, as it gave a peculiar significance to his teaching in the middle of last century. Here was a man of first-rate, if not unique and transcendent gifts, heir to a distinguished philosophic and economic heritage, who had not only accumulated great stores of learning, but had also mastered himself in such degree as to bring an almost unexampled measure of fairness and generosity to the consideration of questions whose discussion often develops more heat than light. Abundantly capable of taking a side and maintaining a position against all comers; no stranger either to the joy of battle or to the worth of

battle-cry and epithet, especially when the strife is political and economic; a convinced confessor of the experience-philosophy, moreover, he was singularly fitted to become the high priest of that Utilitarianism which, in their several generations, Bentham, James Mill, and Grote exalted into a substitute for religion; and he had no other religion of which to rid himself. Like Gladstone among the Tories, he was the rising hope of the stern and unbending Radicals; and he was destined to spread a somewhat similar dismay in the ranks of his friends. He did not, of course, become a Tory as his great contemporary became a Liberal, though there were elements in his political creed which the most conservative might regard complacently; and no man of his day was more outspoken and fearless in his exposure of the vices of democracy. Nor have I the least desire to claim him as a convert to any particular religious cult or sect. There is a sense in which he remained true to his early training until the end. He was as unsparing in his criticism of religious as of philosophic or economic dogma; but no man of his, or perhaps of any, generation illustrated better the fascination of religion for the human mind or the hunger of the heart for God. Grote stood more exactly in the strict Utilitarian succession. He was the obedient son of the family, who kept not only its laws but its tradition. John Mill was its *enfant terrible*, — though the words sound like sacrilege, — who,

while remaining true to the genuine principle of life which gave to Utilitarianism and the experience-philosophy such validity as they possessed, yet scandalized his more orthodox brethren by the scant respect he paid to the family conventions.[1]

The truth is that Mill was far too great a man to be confined within the strait barriers erected by his father and Bentham. Consistent in his belief that all knowledge depends upon experience, he was clear-eyed enough to see, and candid enough to admit, that there is an experience of the heart as well as of the head, and that life demands some culture of the feelings as well as of the reasoning faculties. He discerned too that thoughtful people are more likely to be right in what they affirm than in what they deny, and that the fatal weakness of so-called 'systems' of thought lies in their very completeness and consistency, inasmuch as truth always proves to be a richer and more varied thing than the system-builder fancies. The leaven of it is ever fermenting in the logical mass, disarranging its neat categories, and contradicting its boasted finality.[2]

[1] The brethren who suffered most were, I suppose, Mr. and Mrs. Grote; but I keep the masculine noun in memory of the saying attributed to Samuel Rogers, that he always enjoyed "dining at their house. Mr. Grote was so ladylike, and Mrs. Grote was such a gentleman." The needful pinch of salt is supplied by Rogers himself. When asked by some one why he said so many disagreeable things, he answered, "The fact is I have a very weak voice; and unless I say disagreeable things nobody will hear me."

[2] Cf. Mill's *Essay on Coleridge;* also Tulloch, *Religious Thought in Britain*, p. 273; and MacCunn, *Six Radical Thinkers*, pp. 86–87.

Mr. Benn complains, though rather in sorrow than in anger, that although Mill had thus been brought up without religious belief and in habitual association with unbelievers, he showed all his life long a "persistently conciliatory" attitude toward theology.[1] The further insinuation of an unduly prudent truckling to popular opinion to the extent of concealing his views in order to save his influence if not his office, seems to me quite unworthy.[2] It is not cowardice which leads a man whose views are in the process of formation to avoid thrusting them violently down his neighbour's throat. Such a proceeding forbids all hope of legitimate acceptance and assimilation; it assures misunderstanding and justifiable resentment. If the principles of a man's philosophy or theology are candidly avowed, there is no dishonesty, but only common decency and sense in keeping conclusions to himself until he is assured that they are conclusions indeed instead of wayside fancies. No one can say that Mill ever hesitated to proclaim the principles which guided his thought; or that he feared to stand for unpopular views which were clearly right in his eyes. But he was too true a philosopher to treat with mere easy contempt convictions which had entered deep into the life experience of multitudes of his intelligent fellow-men.

It is easy to imagine the dissatisfaction of his father with some of the companions whom John Mill

[1] Benn, *History of English Rationalism*, vol. i, p. 439.

[2] *Op. cit.*, p. 441 and elsewhere.

found in the Utilitarian and Speculative Societies; and it is by no means difficult to understand Mrs. Grote's evident desire to box his ears when, to the scandal of the straiter members of the Benthamite sect, he suddenly appeared as an expositor of the philosophy of Coleridge. The brilliant disciple had broken his leading strings; and though a Utilitarian still, had entered into strange relations with idealism and the poetry of Wordsworth, which to the Grotes were as the daughters of Heth to Isaac and Rebekah.

More than this, he fell into an incorrigible habit of using the phrases and forms of religious expression to illustrate his experience or to bring home his teachings. The period of mental stress through which he passed in the winter of 1826–7 was marked by something which he chose to compare to 'conviction of sin.' Ambition failed, the imagined realization of his dreams lost its charm, life became dull, vacuous, and poor in significance. No doubt reaction from the extraordinary strain to which his mind had been subjected during almost the entire period of childhood and adolescence was the immediate occasion of this crisis; but none the less was it a spiritual crisis. Mr. Birrell has somewhere exclaimed over the fact that of all books, Marmontel's Memoirs should have opened the flood-gates of Mill's long-pent feelings, and thus become the instrument of his 'conversion'; for in a psychological if not a technically religious sense a conversion it seems to have

been. But the reader of the "Autobiography" will remember that the particular passage which brought Mill peace related to the young Marmontel's decision, upon the death of his father, to do what he might by devotion and self-sacrifice to supply the family loss. This is an essentially religious motive, and its appeal to Mill is significant. Marmontel's 'inspiration' — the word is Mill's — proved contagious. It not only brought tears to his reader's eyes but awakened a new life in his heart. Wordsworth's poetry helped to develop and enrich the new elements thus introduced into experience and to encourage that 'conciliatory attitude' toward religion over which the faithful still grieve; even as they grieve over Comte's worship of the memory of "Clotilde," and Buckle's persistence in holding with "passionate conviction" (the phrase is Mr. Benn's) to the immortality of the soul. As life went on this religious note — or semi-religious, if the reader please, since I would not claim too much — deepened. Critical as ever of specific dogmas, the language not of religion merely but of Christianity seems to have become an instinctive resource in some of his most significant utterances; as for instance in the letter to Miss Fox in which he urges the impossibility of rendering worthy service to one's age except a man resolve "to take up his cross and bear it."[1]

With his marriage Mill's deeper life, which his

[1] Cf. MacCunn, *Six Radical Thinkers*, p. 58.

father had done so much to starve, and which he himself had repressed until he seemed to Carlyle like a logic-chopping machine and to some of his more vulgar contemporaries like a "book in breeches," came to its own; and his wife's death seven years later left him a memory which, he tells us, became a religion. Theological speculation seems to have made an increasing appeal to him, and when, after his death, the "Three Essays on Religion" appeared, the world realized how far he had wandered from the grace of utilitarian orthodoxy. With engaging and characteristic candour Lord Morley, in his review of these essays, admits that the author's conclusions, and "what is even more important, the spirit of the conclusions, are a rather keen surprise." This was more than thirty years ago; but Lord Morley's distinction is still valid. It is the spirit of the essays, rather than their specific conclusions, which is significant. They are as sternly critical as ever of commonly received theological notions; but their trend toward religion is unmistakable. Not only does Mill emphasize its place and value in history; he goes further in stating with clearness and cogency the distinction between positive and negative truth and the general value of the former for the satisfaction of man's deeper needs. His purpose thus becomes constructive and he casts about to discover and coördinate such religious experiences and beliefs as may prove their right to live. Into that discussion we have no time to follow him; suffice

it to say that he finds a place if not a necessity for religion among the highest human activities; that Theism becomes under his hand a term with real, even though limited, content; that the Argument from Design is exalted to a position of influence and dignity which must ever place these essays under the ban of orthodox 'rationalists'; [1] that he discovers room in the world for such a messenger as Christ charged with an express mission "to lead mankind to truth and virtue"; and that it would be difficult "even for an unbeliever to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete, than to endeavour so to live that Christ would approve our life." [2]

Disraeli, with a flippancy and presumption which were all the more characteristic because they may in this instance have been unconscious, once proclaimed himself "upon the side of the angels." Mill in these three essays comes near to doing the same thing, though with this difference: that his sincerity and reverence for all true and noble things leaves us in far less doubt as to his fitness for their company.

While Mill and his circle were thus working out the conclusions of philosophical radicalism, vast social and economic changes were taking place in Eng-

[1] I am prepared to sympathize with not a little rationalistic criticism of Mill's application of the argument; but only because of my conviction that the development of science since his day has given to it a validity and scope which makes his use of it seem meagre.

[2] *Three Essays on Religion*, "Theism," part v, p. 255, Amer. ed.

land. True to their traditions and to their genius for the *via media*, Englishmen were assimilating the results of the Revolution even while they condemned its methods. We have caught a glimpse of the reforms of the century's first three decades in an earlier chapter. The Reform Bill introduced a new era of economic and social, as distinguished from mere political, development. Fifty years were yet to elapse before suffrage should become practically universal; but the principle involved was granted and progress toward democracy was henceforth inevitable. No less inevitable was it that the masses of the people, as soon as they were assured of political rights, should go on to demand an uplift of their economic and social status. It is doubtful if we yet realize how profound and far-reaching were the elements of social change contained in the agitation for Free Trade, the growth of the great factory districts, the passage of the Factory Acts, the rise and development of Trade Unions, Chartism, and the Coöperative Movement, together with the crusade against slavery which, in the United States, overshadowed all other questions.

These movements are all more or less vividly reflected in the books of the day, although so far as this literature related itself immediately to the passing phase of a social question it was generally ephemeral. Cobbett, for instance, is little likely to be read to-day for anything he said as a political and social radical; though his spirited sketches of

English woods and fields are as vivid as ever. Dust and oblivion might threaten even "Uncle Tom's Cabin" were it not for the perennial elements of human tragedy and comedy which it contains. All these great movements made their appeal to religion, and most of them voiced their protest against what seemed to the agitators to be the apathy and indifference of the Church. Cobbett, who of course touched this period only at its beginning, is loud in his denunciation of the "Hampshire Parsons," with their Toryism and predilection for vested rights. Ebenezer Elliott, the Corn-Law Rhymer, introduces a telling irony into the pious resignation of his song, — to the tune of "Robin Adair," —

Child, is thy father dead?
Father is gone!
Why did they tax his bread?
God's will be done!
Mother has sold her bed;
Better to die than wed!
Where shall she lay her head?
Home we have none![1]

Thomas Cooper, the Chartist poet, imprisoned for conspiracy and sedition, became a skeptic during his confinement, and went out upon his release as an apostle of unbelief. These men and the tone of their protest may be taken as representative of a certain type of religious and political radicalism. Yet upon the other hand is to be noted the fact that

[1] *Works*, edited by his Son, vol. i, p. 381.

such reforms as they advocated have never failed to make their appeal to religion finally, or to find among believing men their most faithful and steadfast champions. It is of the essence of faith to be constructive; and a careless or frightened — and therefore cruel — world listens sometimes to the voice of the reformer who is bent upon ultimate construction when it would arm itself against the mere revolutionist. It is not too much to say that the influences of permanent beneficence exerted during this period generally related themselves to the sources of faith rather than of unbelief. Among the aristocracy, no one gave himself more wholeheartedly to the service of the forlorn and needy than Lord Ashley, afterward Earl of Shaftesbury, an Evangelical of Evangelicals. It avails little to reply that he was a Tory and generally out of sympathy with the political aspirations of the poor; and that some of his methods savour too much of institutionalism and patronage. The fact remains that he probably did as much as any man of his generation, as he certainly did more than any man of rank, to fasten the attention of his countrymen upon the needs of the dependent classes. Ebenezer Elliott was a man of piety; while Cooper, who before his prison experiences of Strauss and skepticism had been a preacher, subsequently recanted his skeptical opinions and utterances, became a convinced believer, and a Baptist minister. Mrs. Gaskell, who knew at first hand the lot of the poor and the mingled feel-

ings of bitterness and hope which animated the early Trade-Unionists, makes much of the religious element in "Mary Barton." Kingsley's "Yeast" and "Alton Locke," together with his essays and speeches upon social topics, are saturated with religion. Cobden, while primarily, of course, a practical politician and economist, was no stranger to those ideals which relate themselves intimately to the religious life. He is commonly regarded as the protagonist of the Manchester School and, *ipso facto*, a somewhat mitigated Mr. Gradgrind. In point of fact he was a paladin chivalrously bent upon the delivery of a captive, Trade, whom his imagination endowed with the charms and graces as well as the wrongs of an imprisoned princess. He was zealous in repudiating the charge that his eye was fixed solely upon the 'main chance.' He maintained that, while the material gain from the success of his principle must be great, the moral gain would be so much greater as to reduce it to relative insignificance. "I see," he said in 1846, "in the Free Trade principle that which shall act on the moral world as the principle of gravitation in the universe — drawing men together, thrusting aside the antagonism of race and creed and language, and uniting us in the bonds of eternal peace." [1]

Mazzini's long residence in England, his intimate

[1] I am indebted for this quotation as well as for several suggestions upon the influence of Mill, Cobden, and especially Mazzini, to the admirable essays of Professor John MacCunn, recently published under the title *Six Radical Thinkers*. See p. 121.

association with many British writers, and the large influence exerted by his genius for literature as well as politics forbid that we should pass him by in silence. Certain elements in his radicalism, such as his apology for political assassination and his refusal to give any countenance to the policies of Cavour because the Italian unity toward which they looked was monarchical rather than republican, were too extreme and *doctrinaire* to enlist Anglo-Saxon sympathy. They savoured too much of the uncompromising spirit animating extreme Abolitionists in New England to appeal to British or even to American conservatism. But, on the other hand, Mazzini's conviction that if democracy were first to triumph and then to endure it must be through its recognition of religious obligation and its acceptance of faith, was of a sort to win a much quicker and heartier assent among English-speaking peoples than upon the Continent. He was far enough from being an orthodox Churchman. But there is no reason to doubt that the motto "God and the People" represented his creed as well as his war-cry; and that his allegiance to the former article was as loyal as to the latter. He was as like Carlyle in his dependence upon intuition, and his hatred of the balder forms of Utilitarianism, as he was unlike him in his fellow-feeling for the aspirations and ambitions of the masses. Ruskin and Carlyle could have counted upon him in their protest against what the former calls Mill's substitution of patriotism for religion.

"Actually," cried Carlyle, "the most paltry rag of" — here followed a stream of vituperation too rapid for Ruskin to note — "it has fallen to my lot to come in with. Among my aquaintance I have not seen a person talking of a thing he so little understood."[1]

Utilitarianism was not calculated to produce heroes, — though in the famous passage from the "Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy" where Mill professes his determination to go to Hell rather than enter Heaven at the price of his convictions, there is a note of the heroic, — and Mazzini was as romantic in his love of heroes as Carlyle; indeed, from his exhortations to the Roman Republic in 1849, and to the United States in 1854, it would seem as though his mind dwelt as fondly upon the development of hero-states as of individual hero-men. His better known writings not only have this ethical and religious complexion; they have a hortatory if not a homiletic form. Behind the Old Testament directness and fervour of his prophecy there was a conviction corresponding to the Hebrew 'Thus saith the Lord.' If it hoped to succeed, democracy must find its ground in theism, and if it were to endure it must keep the faith.[2]

The radicalism of which we have been speaking in the field of philosophy and politics had its coun-

[1] *Præterita*, vol. ii, chap. xii.

[2] MacCunn, *Six Radical Thinkers*, pp. 191, 196, 209 sqq.

terpart in a liberal movement within the Church of England. The so-called Early Oriel School had been its forerunner. Men like Whately, Hampden, and Arnold, the *bêtes noires* of the Catholic party, had fostered it. Milman, in his "History of the Jews" and "Latin Christianity," had gone beyond his predecessors and sacrificed ecclesiastical preferment by venturing to call Abraham "a sheik." Mansel — though himself a Tory and far from sympathetic toward either the Low or the Broad Church — in his famous Bampton Lectures was at once admitting the change which impended in religious thought, and, by the use of Sir William Hamilton's philosophy, unwittingly forging blades for later agnostic sword-play. Baden Powell in his "Unity of Worlds," "Christianity without Judaism," and "The Order of Nature" was anticipating, though with less opposition and alarm on the part of conservatives than might have been expected, many of the chief controversies of the third quarter of the century. Jowett and Stanley were meanwhile introducing the results of German criticism and philosophy, the one by means of his commentaries and the other by his exceedingly popular work in the realm of Jewish and Christian history.

Perhaps the greatest mediating influence, however, between Religion and Literature during this period was Frederick Denison Maurice. His own work was in the main too distinctively theological to be classed under the head of general literature.

Indeed he gloried in a term which many religious writers prefer to thrust into the background, and openly preferred the word 'theology' to 'religion,' since the latter, as he maintained, savoured a little of paganism. But he was the heir of Coleridge in things religious and philosophical, and wherever the leaven of Coleridge's influence has had fair chance to work, some of the results have always found true and often high literary expression. Maurice's early novel, "Eustace Conway," seems scarcely to have won notice enough to justify a critic in saying that it has been forgotten; and even his best-known writings are, I suppose, little read to-day. They lack the universal quality which in "The Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit" and "Aids to Reflection," as well as in parts of the "Biographia Literaria," still makes its quick appeal to the modern man. Bred a Unitarian and passing thence in his early maturity into the communion and service of the Established Church, Maurice's work reflects his surroundings. It is marked, if not marred, by a certain institutional habit of mind. His famous book on the Kingdom of Christ, for instance, bears as its sub-title, "Hints on the Principles, Ordinances, and Constitution of the Catholic Church, in Letters to a Member of the Society of Friends." On the other hand, he maintained with steadfastness and distinguished ability certain principles of immediate fitness to the need of the time, and capable of application to the need of all times. Many men of deeply religious nature

found themselves in a strait between the hardness of Evangelical Calvinism and the artificiality of the new sacerdotalism for which the Oxford Movement stood. For them Maurice had a genuine gospel. Nor did he fail to influence John Mill in a degree sufficient abundantly to justify his father's fears.

One of the two great ideas which gave him power may be found set forth in a letter written in December, 1833, to his mother, who had passed from the family Unitarianism into the position of a somewhat extreme Calvinist. In it he argues that, instead of being an object of God's just anger because of his inherited sinfulness, "every man is in Christ," and has but to claim and make his own a heritage of blessing. The second principle related to the brotherhood of believers. Like many converts to a highly organized and historic church, Maurice had no liking for Dissent and could be eloquent if not bitter against what he thought to be schism. But he was no worshipper of conformity for its own sake. The basis of unity was to be discovered in the positive elements common to the faith of all Christians. Wherever truth was found, though it had been never so sadly twisted to a sectarian purpose, something of its positive and universal character could still be discerned, developed, and redeemed.[1] Here were the elements of a liberality at once rational and religious, which might not only make it possible for men of different theological views to live together,

[1] Cf. Tulloch, *Religious Thought in Britain*, pp. 269–278.

but had no less direct a bearing upon the new world of rapidly developing science and the old world of sadly sick society. "Nature and life were from God at a time when science on the one hand and asceticism on the other tended to sever them from His presence." [1]

It is easy to discern how such a teacher as this, anointed as he was with a true prophet's unction, should have stirred the hearts of men like Kingsley, Thomas Hughes, and Robertson. He thus became a chief power in the movement known as "Christian Socialism," although he would not own the name and disliked even the semblance of founding a school or sect. From him and his disciples may be traced an influence which has not only embodied itself in many institutions of the 'social settlement' type, but has proved to be a vital motive in literature on both sides of the Atlantic. In America, moreover, it is safe to say that the reinterpreters of religious thought who have given to their writings at once a positive tone and a literary form,—men like Mulford and T. T. Munger,— would accord to Maurice a chief place among their sources of inspiration; while the rank and file of preachers of the more cultivated type owe him as real a debt, although, as years have passed, his message has most often reached them at second hand.

Horace Bushnell and James Martineau deserve

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 294.

to be mentioned with him, although each is separated from the other as he is from Maurice by gulfs of distinction. Both were radicals, but of constructive sympathy and purpose. Both, in the best sense of a dubious word, were rhetoricians, and developed to a high degree of perfection styles of marked individuality, which were not only singularly fitted for the task of self-expression, but in themselves would possess great value as objects of study were it not for their fatal tendency to induce imitation. It was the happy lot of both these writers to help deliver their fellows from the tyranny of the set phrase. Both became in turn the authors of phrases as haunting as anything in St. Augustine's "Confessions" or Newman's Sermons. "Low grades of being want low objects; but the want of man is God," is Bushnell's parallel to St. Augustine's "Thou hast made us for Thyself"; while Martineau's "God has so arranged the chronometry of our spirits that there shall be a thousand silent moments between the striking hours," reflects life well enough to have been chosen by Mr. Eden Phillpotts for the name-text of a characteristic book. Bushnell was furthermore a student of the philosophy of human speech, and the "Dissertation on Language," with which he introduced one of his most influential works, deserves a far wider reading than it has ever had. Its doctrine of the symbolic nature of all speech, while in one sense it is evident enough to be generally

recognized, finds in his hands its psychological application to the common needs of literature and religion. Bushnell recognized as few theologians have done the poetic elements in religion and the essentially tentative character of religious speech. A man with so discerning an eye and so rich an experience could not permit his theology — to say nothing of his religion — to degenerate into a mere exercise in definition.

The fact that so many of the apologists and the assailants of Christianity have agreed to regard it as a system of doctrines authoritatively given, highly developed, and capable not only of exact but of final definition, is accountable for the major part of religious controversy. This was eminently true of the warfare accompanying the Unitarian schism in New England early in last century. The Unitarians were right in their protest against the elaborate and artificial scheme whereby the orthodox undertook not merely to account for, but to label and docket, the inscrutable thoughts of God and the multiplied needs of man. They were wrong in carrying their protest so far as often to give a negative complexion to their whole attitude and sometimes to throw contempt upon religion as an experience. The question might indeed be raised whether this overdoing of their Protestantism which resulted in a semi-starvation of the religious nature has not been accountable for the grotesque and weird radicalisms that in some parts of Amer-

ica have threatened to make their societies veritable Caves of Adullam; since it is a pretty well recognized principle of experience that religious neglect results in the perversion rather than the death of the religious faculty, and that the ultimate choice lies, not between belief and no-belief, but between faith and superstition.[1]

The orthodox, on the other hand, were for a time incited to renewed fervour of definition and to greater elaboration of system. Here they were hopelessly wrong, just as they were fundamentally right in maintaining that religion was a great individual and social experience, to be defined anew in terms of each man's speech and of each generation's corporate life. They were right too in their belief that religion is essentially an outreaching and adventurous experience, which must decay if the spirit of adventure languish. Hence sprung their missionary activity, which, as I have already indicated, is likely ultimately to be one of the distinctive and outstanding marks of the century. It has already produced very considerable results in the way of contributions to the literature of geography, ethnology, language, and general science. As the period of crude misunderstanding and contempt of missionary enterprise

[1] I would not seem to imply that the better qualified Unitarian leaders have ever welcomed the conditions here referred to; my impression is that they have, at least among themselves, acknowledged them as dangers incident to their history and position as a radical party. Of late the positive and constructive note has been sounded far more clearly.

passes and the generally high quality, not only of the adventure itself but of the men and women who undertake it, appears, the vast literary possibilities which it presents are bound to make themselves manifest. Practical idealism has always been and is likely still to prove the prolific mother of literature. The idealism of the mystic is often too vague and undefined to submit to the forms necessary for literary expression. But let the Quaker, for instance, enter upon some genuine quest which compels him into militancy, as did George Fox when upon the saner of his preaching tours and in his protests against crying social evils, or as Whittier did when championing the abolition of slavery; or let him be touched by the spirit of some great historic church as Shorthouse was before he wrote "John Inglesant," and his mystic idealism becomes at once a source and instrument of literary power. On the other hand, a somewhat similar phenomenon appears when idealism, which has long been at once nourished and repressed within the borders of a fixed system, finds its bonds broken and its wings set free. In the realm of ideas, as in that of hydraulics, a measure of repression is necessary to significant and useful expression; the place for the wheel lying at the foot of the penstock.

The most fruitful period in the history of American letters illustrates what I mean. Emerson, Bryant, Hawthorne, Longfellow, Whittier, Lowell, and Holmes were all New England men. All, with the

possible exception of Whittier, and in his case the exception is apparent rather than real, were heirs to the Puritan heritage. Their forefathers' Calvinism had, to be sure, become greatly mitigated on its way to them. Its husk had burst, but its kernel was yet sound. Emerson was not only a minister, but the son of generations of ministers; and although his opinions were too radical even for the Unitarians whom he set himself to serve, a New England Congregational minister of the better type he remained all his life long, in his serene dignity, his humour, his independence, his interest in local civic affairs, his essential piety, and his keen regard for the ethical values of life.[1] Holmes, also a minister's son, seems to have been the only one of the company whose revolt from Calvinism was marked by any bitterness, and his bitterness is that of a humourist whose sense of the ludicrous I believe to have been a legitimate Puritan heirloom.

These men were delivered from the tyranny of the Calvinistic forms of thought. They profited inexpressibly, however, by the fact that the thought which these forms first strove to express, and finally threatened to smother, was of a very real and in-

[1] This fact has recently been interestingly and repeatedly emphasized by Prof. Woodberry. It is also to be remembered that Emerson's official service in the churches, which is commonly supposed to have ended on his withdrawal from his Boston pulpit, really outlasted that event by a considerable time. He preached often in New Bedford, and for some three years supplied a church in East Lexington.

tense sort. For generations it had concerned itself with matters of great and sometimes awful import. However cramped the conclusions at which it arrived might seem to be, the fields through which it ranged in search of them were nobly ample. To say, as we are wont to do, that the new wine of this generation burst the old bottles, is to do violence to an already sadly overworked figure. The old forms gave way, to be sure, but only that the wholesome substance pent in by them might reach and serve a larger world. Calvinism had been essentially rationalistic, though mysticism of a repressed type was always latent in it. Emerson seemed to throw logic to the winds, avowed himself to be a frank intuitionalist, and spoke often with the voice of the oracle who is in mystic and immediate communication with the Source of Truth. Hence comes the insufferably irritating quality of his style in some of the Essays, where he seems to patronize God and Man alike, — a fault of condescension from which in personal intercourse he was beautifully free, — and yet here lay no doubt something of the secret of his power. Calvinism furthermore dealt with the race, and with man as an integral element in it; endowing him, however, with an imperishable individuality. Emerson is dubious of personality in theory, and goes far at times toward dogmatic denial of it; but yet — and the contradiction is a very striking one — he was one of the most potent forces of his century making for the integrity and autonomy — that is, the true free-

dom — of the individual. The key of the mystery is to be most hopefully sought, whether it is to be found or not, in the fact that Emerson was no systematic philosopher, but only a man as profoundly conscious of a nature made in the divine image as he was careless of mere consistency. Call him mystic, transcendentalist, egoist,[1] irrational optimist, what you will — his value for the world at large lies in the fact that after all he is so incurably religious. He taught the youth of the latter half of his century two things that every man must learn before he can complete his life: first self-reliance; second, God-reliance.[2] The one question which made him of use to orthodox and heterodox alike, and which he was always asking, is simply an echo of Christ's great inquiry, "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul; or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

The spiritual quality of the work of Bryant, Whittier, Longfellow, and Lowell is akin to that which characterizes Emerson. They are less transcendental and more specifically Western, as contrasted with the curiously Oriental type of mind and style which Emerson sometimes reveals. They move more naturally in the realm of the concrete

[1] One of the finest illustrations in literature of the immemorial debate between Pot and Kettle is the passage in which Ruskin criticises Emerson on the ground that "his egoism reiterates itself to provocation."

[2] Cf. James Freeman Clarke, *Nineteenth Century Questions*, pp. 278–279.

and the particular. Bryant's faith expressed in his "To a Waterfowl," even though rather limited in content, is as definite as it is beautifully phrased. Whittier found precisely the stimulus which his gently militant nature needed in championship of the unpopular Abolitionist cause. His muse threatened to prove but puerile and futile until it was converted to the service of fellow-man as well as to the love of God. Longfellow is the most consistently urbane and kindly of the group, moving habitually upon what may be termed the domestic plane. His briefer tales are fitted to their setting in a Wayside Inn; "Hiawatha" and "Evangeline" to the family fireside; while the songs which have sung themselves around the world and made him one of the most popular of poets have just the range of family joys and sorrows. This gentleness, — one might almost call it meekness, — which holds the poet in its gracious thrall even when he essays semi-militant themes, has obscured in the eyes of too many critics his real mastery of form. A trace of the bully is inherent in criticism, which loves either to belabour or to patronize those whom it is not forced to praise. Few have had the heart to offer any violence to Longfellow; but the attitude of half-contemptuous patronage has become almost a fashion. In point of fact he was an exceptionally deft craftsman, whose imagination supplied him with material of high quality and whose purity of heart gave to his work the odour of a genuine sweetness and sanctity.

"Hiawatha" is a very notable achievement, in spite of the dreadful facility of its metre; and there is enough of the divine afflatus in "Evangeline" to assure it a good old age, which is all that anything in English hexameters should dare or wish to ask; since even Kingsley, who had the deftest hand, could make them barely tolerable. Many of his translations are among the best in the language. But after all this has been said, the fact remains that the hiding of Longfellow's power — and power he has — lies in his discernment of the secrets of the plain man's heart, and his application to them of the appeal of conscience and the comfort of religion.

Lowell's speech and perhaps his faith are of a somewhat robuster type. Far inferior to Longfellow in his sense of rhythm and the deftness of his handiwork in verse, — like Emerson he was essentially a master of prose, — and not quite free at times from the taint of sentimentality, he is upon the whole an admirable exponent of New England shrewdness, humour, and virile right-mindedness. The "Biglow Papers" are unique. Their exaggeration is of the sort which Dickens employed to etch his types. Their philosophy and their use of whimsical understatement on the one hand, or grotesque overstatement on the other, to give effect to their humour, are Yankee to the life. And with it all there is the unmistakable moral purpose, neither thrust pugnaciously forward nor allowed to lapse into obliv-

ion, but as constant in the poet's "Biglow Papers," "Sir Launfal," and the "Commemoration Ode," as it had ever been in his father's pulpit. This is not for a moment to imply that any element of the mere 'tract' is permitted to obtrude itself. The ethical import of Lowell's poetry is simply the natural expression of his convictions. He was, as Mr. Watts-Dunton has finely said, "in courage, in truthfulness, in everything, the type of the Puritan idea in its most bracing expression." His brother poet, Whittier, voiced the same thought in calling him —

> . . . the New World's child
> Who in the language of their farm-fields spoke
> The wit and wisdom of New England folk,
> Shaming a monstrous wrong.[1]

This positive note may sometimes escape the reader's first glance, in view of Lowell's capacity for giving a humourous turn to the most sacred themes. But the negative suggestion of —

> John P.
> Robinson he
> Sez they did n't know everythin' down in Judee,

is apparent rather than real. In fact it is a whimsical echo of Christ's own frequent warning lest the forms of one age should fetter the freedom of the Spirit in another. So Hosea Biglow's sapient —

> An' you 've gut to git up airly
> Ef you want to take in God,—

[1] J. G. Whittier, *James Russell Lowell.*

is as sound in its religious and ethical content as it is racy of the soil.[1]

The secret of the matter was suggested by Lowell himself when he wrote, after a reading of the late Sir Leslie Stephen's "English Thought in the Eighteenth Century,"—

"I am very much in the state of mind of the Bretons who revolted against the revolutionary government, and wrote upon their banners, 'Give us back our God.' I suppose I am an intuitionalist, and there I mean to stick. I accept the challenge of common sense and claim to have another faculty, as I should insist that a peony was red though twenty colour-blind men denied it." [2]

I am not concerned here to defend the soundness of Lowell's apologetic method. Their philosophical validity apart, however, his words bear significant testimony to the value of faith for the sort of work which he had set himself to do; and in this respect he may without violence be regarded as representative of the whole group of American essayists and poets who have just passed in review.

[1] Mr. Andrew Lang expressed this feeling in his article in *The Sign of the Ship* soon after Lowell's death. "Mr. Lowell's religious faith (if one may mention such matters) had a solidity and fervour which surprised some, and might well convert others of a wavering temper" (*Longman's Magazine*, vol. xviii, p. 666).

[2] Cf. article on "The Outgrown Agnosticism," in *Boston Transcript* of Feb. 26, 1904.

CHAPTER XI

THE GREAT TWIN BRETHREN: TENNYSON AND BROWNING

"Death, death! It is this harping on death I despise so much. . . . This idle and often cowardly as well as ignorant harping! Why should we not change like everything else? In fiction, in poetry, in so much of both French as well as English, and, I am told, in American art and literature, the shadow of death — call it what you will, despair, negation, indifference — is upon us. But what fools who talk thus! . . . Without death, which is our crape-like, church-yardy word for change, for growth, there could be no prolongation of that which we call life."[1]

Mr. William Sharp records the words as uttered by Browning in his presence. They vouch for themselves not less by their brusqueness, involution, and demand upon the reader's breath for transport through the parentheses, than by their wholesome tone and savour of good physical and spiritual digestion. It was the Browning of the familiar portraits who uttered them, though they have a certain verve and sparkle which the composed, eupeptic face scarcely promises. I have set them at the head of

[1] William Sharp, *Life of Browning*, pp. 195–196.

this chapter to justify its title; for their sentiment is no less characteristic of Tennyson than of their author. He would not, to be sure, have chosen to phrase his feeling in precisely this form, though his prose could at times be as rugged as Browning's; indeed, he seems to have cultivated in conversation a little of the style which his brother-poet so often overdid in verse.

In an earlier chapter I have marked the tendency of critics to contrast great contemporary names in literature, as though Dickens must needs be measured in terms of Thackeray, or a common denominator be determined for Emily Brontë and George Eliot. Criticism of this order is sure to become peddling and ungenerous. It is a commonplace that one star differeth from another star in glory, but the task of the intelligent observer is a far larger one than the mere determination of their magnitudes; indeed, when this classification is complete, the scientific student will be the first to remember that these apparent magnitudes are matters of relative distance as truly as of size; that there is a glory of constellation as well as of star; and that one of the most fascinating of celestial phenomena consists in the great binary stars where two suns revolve about a common centre, each supplementing the mass and the light of its fellow.

This frequent mistake of criticism is, however, but a tribute to the extraordinary abundance of its material during the mid-Victorian years. It is only as

we draw away from the period that the vision of its wealth grows clear. To have had at once two such novelists as Dickens and Thackeray, two such preachers as Carlyle and Ruskin, and two such poets as Tennyson and Browning, was enough to tempt the critical faculty of any age into arrogance and self-sufficiency. Small wonder that little men have contended over questions of their relative precedence. This is the rule while the contemporary procession files by; later on, time offers us an horizon where we discover that there is not only room but need for such large figures side by side.

To ask which is the greater of these two poets is like inquiring into the relative importance of Spring and Autumn. Indeed, I venture to go further and assert that their relation to each other and their value to life are not unlike the relation and value of Spring and Autumn. Spring stirs the blood, while Autumn grips the heart. To the question whether May's half-ecstatic ebullience is better than October with its crisp air, ripe fruit, and undertone of pathos, what answer is to be returned except "De gustibus non . . . "? The suffrage of the majority of poets will perhaps be given to May; but October has its following of devotees whom it haunts not so much with ecstasy as with peace.

Browning was one of those poets in whom, to use his own fine phrase, "God renews His ancient rapture," the rapture of springtime's life. Tennyson was as truly a poet of life, but it was life face to

face with its great climacteric mysteries of change. He was very conscious that —

> God fulfils Himself in many ways
> Lest one good custom should corrupt the world;

and he knew, none better, that a multitude of these ways are past our finding out. Both poets held one course through life, and spoke one truth, though in widely different accents; both were keenly alive to the trend of contemporary philosophic thought, and were at once inspired and puzzled by the enormous strides of scientific discovery; both knew by instinct and experience the power and prevalence of religious doubt; both were heirs to great religious traditions and convictions. Each acknowledged the necessity of recasting the traditions; neither could rid himself of the convictions. These were recognized to have grown up out of experience; to be the products of a true evolutionary process; to belong to life; and therefore to be worth a man's reverent and scientific regard.

It has become the fashion to say that Browning's approach to his art was that of a great harmonist; Tennyson's, that of an equally great melodist. The epigram does somewhat scant justice to Tennyson, while it rather over-praises Browning. Tennyson had a respect for the medium in which he wrought amounting almost to reverence. He rarely cared to ply his ingenuity merely for the sake of seeing what he could do. Large as his facility and his power of

condensation were, he preferred to exercise himself in great rather than in little matters of form. It was better to master blank verse until, with equal fitness of sound to sense, it could tell the heroic story of Arthur's Passing or depict Enoch Arden's boyish play with Philip and Annie, than it was to invent a new metre. Hence, in the midst of abundant variety, there is a notable uniformity of excellence. Not only was he great as a lyric and elegiac poet, but the popularity of the "Idylls" has a deeper and sounder basis than the romantic story or the half-hidden allegory can supply. Although they are something too fragmentary and disjointed to form a true epic, the epic note is sounded with entire clearness and an inevitable appeal, which is all the more compelling because Tennyson had now wrought his blank verse into an instrument perhaps the most nearly perfect for epic purposes of any metre since the hexameters of Virgil.

While Tennyson was thus exercising a mastery over his art as legitimate as it was unquestioned, Browning had become its tyrant. No doubt exists as to his lordship — no more doubt than attaches to the vast wealth of his intellectual and spiritual resources. The difficulty lies in the fact that he could not bring himself to treat the English language and the poetic forms in which he proposed to express his thought with a decent respect. Much can be forgiven to creative genius conscious of a message and impatient for its utterance. It is not only the

privilege, it is doubtless sometimes the duty, of such a man to drive his coach and four through hampering conventions; but if he be an artist, he must respect his art on the one hand and his public on the other. Browning seems to have done neither. A supreme master of English, he appears never to have felt the sacred character of his servant.

> Drop heart's blood where life's wheels grate dry,

he says in "Dis Aliter Visum." The great symbols of speech — and no language can be properly used until its essentially symbolic character is understood — have been fashioned by just this method. They represent far more than ingenious attempts at definition. Generations of experience comprising thought, prayer, and tears are sometimes summed up in common words, and our speech gains significance and facility from the heart's blood that has been mingled with it.

Tennyson wrought very reverently, if sometimes a little too curiously, with language; Browning too often treated it like a mighty slave whose duties ranged from the making of great music to the rattling of pots and pans, but whose rights were an altogether negligible quantity. There was something almost literally Philistine in the perversity with which he loved, having duly blinded his Samson, to set him now to grinding verse which proved to be mere bad prose, and again to the yet more painful task of making Gargantuan sport. The thing is

never commonplace; Browning does not deny himself; but the pity remains that he should descend to such unworthiness, even though able to illuminate it with genius.

What other poet would have dared to write the following passage as rhymed verse?

"'T was obviously as well to take the popular story — understanding how the ineptitudes of the time, and the penman's prejudice, expanding fact into fable fit for the clime, had, by slow and sure degrees, translated it into this myth, this Individuum." [1]

It is a great poem — "The Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" — which begins, —

> Gr–r–r — there go, my heart's abhorrence!
> Water your damned flower-pots, do!

In some editions the opposite page contains a stanza originally entitled "Beer," which ends with the lines: —

> He says that at Greenwich they point the beholder
> To Nelson's coat, still with tar on the shoulder:
> For he used to lean with one shoulder digging,
> Jigging, as it were, and zig-zag-zigging
> Up against the mizzen-rigging.

I do not forget Tennyson's occasional lapses from the plane of dignity and power. "O darling room" is secure of a long and banal life; while the stanza in the second "Locksley Hall," beginning, —

> Poor old Heraldry, poor old History, poor old Poetry,

[1] *Christmas Eve.*

has more than a touch of the feebleness of age. Yet even in these there is a grace of sound which serves too well to keep in mind the meagreness of sense. He was incapable of thumping cacophonic tom-toms for mere exercise.

Browning could occasionally do this; or, to use a worthier figure, he permitted himself sometimes to write poetry as other men lay brick or saw wood. It has been my privilege to know two men of light and leading who were voluminous writers upon great, though somewhat abstruse, themes. Both were esteemed as scholars and teachers. Both were generally voted by discerning pupils to be hopelessly unreadable authors. The would-be reader caught a glimpse between the lines of an industrious hand beginning its daily task at a certain hour, pursuing it through a stated period, and covering its allotted pages. These men wrote a volume with ease while others sweated over a chapter — and the burden of unprofitable books was by so much increased. Browning's work sometimes reflects this method — but with an unhappy difference. The mere son of literary toil, who puts his thought of the day into his manuscript because the hour for writing it has come, is generally a negligible though an irritating factor in the world of letters. Browning, even at his worst, will not be thus dismissed. His genius is so masterful in general that, even when he is unintelligible, — not by reason of profundity of thought but through sheer refusal to take pains enough to

make himself understood, or through a cloudiness in the thought itself, which time, had he been patient, might have cleared up, — we are teased with the suspicion that great treasure may lurk in the rubbish heap. Sometimes it is found there — and we are the less able to neglect the next tangle of parentheses. Sometimes all the wealth we discover has evidently been brought in from without — the votive offering of some Browning Society. No great English poet has ever suffered or deserved so much at the hands of commentators; none has ever shown Browning's capacity for sweet revenge by inoculating them with some of his own worst faults; nor can any rival dispute with him the distinction of having been seriously translated into his native tongue. Mr. David Duff has recently turned "Sordello" into English, and published his translation in an attractive form. Further comment upon Browning's alleged obscurity is needless, beyond the statement that for the average reader of "Sordello" such a volume will be no less necessary a companion than is a glossary of terms to the understanding of the "Canterbury Tales." No Mrs. Carlyle of the future can read the poem without discovering whether Sordello was a man, a city, or a book; nor need any convalescent Douglas Jerrold be seized with apprehensions of idiocy because its opening sentences refuse to yield a rational idea.

It would be unfair to judge Browning by "Sordello"; but it is necessary to put the poem in the

forefront of his works before we can adequately realize the literary anomaly presented by its author's style. "Sordello" is a marvel, and the better it is known the more the wonder grows. Much is to be said for Mr. Sharp's claim that its obscurity is due to a "warped anxiety for irreducible concision."[1] Concise Browning often is, to the lowest terms; and he is no less often as diffuse as a wilderness of disjointed parentheses can make him. But under no conceivable circumstances could "Sordello" have been made an 'easy' poem.

> "Thoughts may be
> Over poetical for poetry,"

says Naddo to Sordello in Book III, and in his youthful treatment of the soul's development Browning illustrates his own words. In the "Prelude" Wordsworth essayed a cognate task; and by common consent wrote the least readable of his longer poems. He illustrated the growth of a poet's mind; Browning, the rebirth of a poet's soul. Without inquiring too curiously into their several definitions of 'mind' and 'soul,' readers of the two poems will feel instinctively the difference between Wordsworth's philosophic detachment and Browning's identification of Sordello's self with the world of nature and of man through which he not only moves but of which he becomes a part.[2]

[1] William Sharp, *Life of Browning*, p. 106.

[2] I would not imply, however, that Wordsworth was a stranger to the mystic's rapture. In a letter included in Tennyson's *Life*

The closing sentences of the Dedication of "Sordello" offer us a key to the poet's work as a whole.

"The historical decoration was purposely of no more importance than a background requires; and my stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul; little else is worth study. I, at least, always thought so; you, with many known and unknown to me, think so; others may one day think so."[1]

The path along which we follow Sordello from careless boyhood, through selfishly ambitious youth, to the premature age in which he realizes the bitter lot of the people about him and the petty evanescence of all accomplishment or fame which does not take account of their need and represent exertion in their service, may be hard to follow, but its direction and its goal are sure. A man never fulfils himself until he realizes that the greatest thing in the world is its life, as evidenced first in his own soul and then in the souls of men about him, with whom he must live serviceably.

Prof. Tyndall says that Wordsworth, walking one evening with a friend, seized a gate which they were approaching, and remarked to his companion as he held it firmly, "My dear sir, to assure myself of the existence of my own body, I am sometimes obliged to grasp an object like this and shake it" (*Alfred, Lord Tennyson*, vol. ii, p. 474).

[1] It should be remembered that this is not the utterance of Browning's youth, but of his mature conviction. The Dedication was not written until 1860.

Tennyson was always exclaiming against the cant phrase "Art for Art's sake" and amended it to "Art for Art — and Man's sake."[1] Browning in "Sordello" takes up his dark though mighty parable exactly to the same effect. Here both were at one with the deeper message of the Christian faith. Both were essentially religious men from youth to age. Neither can be accounted for in respect of heredity except by giving large place to the influence of family religion. Tennyson's father was a clergyman as well as a poet; and through all the son's life and work there runs a certain Church of England strain. One hesitates to write the words lest they should seem to connote sectarianism with its attendant narrowness. Tennyson was a very intense Englishman and, in my own view, the better poet for it. He was not free from the prejudices of the class into which birth introduced him; his occasional references to France and the French are humourously insular; and he looked askance at Dissenters. But upon the whole he kept his prejudices for private conversation and dedicated his verse to larger uses. Like many another of her greater sons, it was the Church as an element in the national life, bound up with the hearts and homes of long generations, symbolizing man's aspiration after forgiveness, vision, and immortality, that he loved. Through these avenues rather than by the authority of article or creed, her deeper influences reached him; and in these aspects he presented

[1] *Alfred, Lord Tennyson*, vol. ii, p. 92.

her to the world. There is a certain elegance — to use a dubious word — about Tennyson's poetry ; a fineness of grain, a purity alike of thought and of expression, an essential high-mindedness that avoids mere austerity without sacrifice of simplicity, which the world has come to associate with a type of man bred in an English parsonage-house and trained at an English university under the old classical traditions. Such breeding, when permitted to have its way with great natural gifts, inevitably begets a distinction far higher and more comprehensive than mere manner. It ministers to the development of an art which by its grace, wholesomeness, and humanity, is secure of long life.

At the risk of making a distinction which to some will seem invidious, I should say that in very much the same degree Browning represents the non-conforming element in English life and verse. The analogy must not be pressed too far ; but even a casual reader will recall abundant illustrations of what I mean. In the best sense Browning was a man of the world, conventional, with the common serviceable conventionality of a gentleman who meets other men upon their own plane, respecting their rights as he would have his own respected ; yet this very thing he carried to the point of unconventionality. He was as cosmopolitan as Tennyson was national. No great English poet has been so little British. This is not to say that he was unpatriotic ; — "Home Thoughts from Abroad," "O to be in

England," and perhaps even more the satisfaction which he seems to have found in a drama of English History like "Strafford," or of English life like "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon," would refute that charge; — but none the less Italy rather than England seems to be his home; and it is the Italy, not merely of the Italians, but of the expatriates of every clime and tongue, — the Italy where men touch the life of all nations through their representatives. Shakespeare, too, loved Venice and Verona; but as an Englishman gifted with transcendent insight and sympathies might love them — from London or Warwickshire. Universal as Shakespeare's genius was, there was an honest English flavour of common sense about its expression. If he went abroad for a theme it was that he might bring it home and illustrate it in the light he knew the best. Byron also gloried in what he supposed to be his cosmopolitan divorce from all things insular; yet he was haunted to the last by Mrs. Grundy. Britain, and what his jaundiced eyes mistook for British respectability, were necessary to him in order that they might be perpetually mocked or defied; without their stimulus half his inspiration must have fled. Such sophomoric perversity was of course impossible to Browning. The lines to Edward FitzGerald remain to show us how cruel his wrath could be; but his was quite too broad and sane a nature to be betrayed into any echo of Cain's dyspepsia or Manfred's mock-heroics.

His treatment of men and things was essentially reverent, yet he loved a manner of approach which the habitually conforming mind found it hard to understand. "Fifine at the Fair" may illustrate what I mean. The subject, like the scene, is French rather than English. A man, accompanied by his wife whom he respects as well as loves, sees in a travelling show a buxom performer whose physical charms appeal to him no less than the curious problem presented by her occupation. It is from the standpoint of this struggle between a permanent attachment and a passing fancy, that the poet discusses the question of man's relation to the temporal and the eternal. The problem is essentially ethical and religious; the method of approach is unusual enough to have given Mrs. Grundy some pain, had not the poem itself been so unconscionably difficult as to keep her from acquaintance with more than its title.

It is this "clashing complexity of human life," involving problems which no mere conventional explanations suffice to solve, that brings Browning to the threshold of religion; and his exhortation in the Prologue to "Pacchiarotto,"—

> Hold on, hope hard in the subtle thing
> That 's spirit, —

goes far to explain not merely where he found his poetic material and inspiration, but how, in spite of defects which must have swamped a lesser poet,

he has managed to win an ever-increasing number of readers and disciples. The facts that at the beginning of his career Browning owed much to the favourable criticism of Mr. W. J. Fox, a Unitarian minister of high literary gifts, that later on in life he worshipped statedly in a Congregational Chapel, and that his 'orthodoxy' often brought him into conflict with 'rationalistic' friends, are perhaps worth noting in this connection, although they are not of the first importance.[1]

No adequate estimate can be made of the material which these two poets wrought into verse, without taking serious account of the Bible. Professor van Dyke, who has published a list of over four hundred passages in which Tennyson reflects the thought or echoes the language of Scripture texts, remarks upon the bond of sympathy which the Bible forms between the most cultivated and the simplest people.[2] Tennyson's saturation with the thought of the Bible and his intimacy with its literary style go far to account for his immediate appeal to multitudes of readers. The problems of Scripture are universal, and its solutions, whether men hear or forbear, of universal interest. In both English and German it

[1] The late Mr. Moncure Conway used to say that Browning once joined debate with an itinerant atheist preacher whom on one of his walks he found haranguing a crowd, and vehemently upheld the Faith. It was not unlike him. Cf. Mrs. Sutherland Orr's *Life and Letters*, vol. ii, pp. 630–632.

[2] *The Poetry of Tennyson*, tenth ed., p. 247. See the whole chapter, pp. 245–279.

has exercised a profoundly formative influence upon the national tongue. Into its language has been poured so much of man's deepest feeling and noblest aspiration as to make it symbolic in very high degree; and, as has been already noted, the worth of language is largely determined by its symbolic power. Hence poets and orators, however little concerned they may be with religion, have natural recourse to Scripture language in their endeavour to touch the heart or reflect the experience of men.

Tennyson and Browning, however, not only had this natural tendency to use the speech and figures of the Bible: they were both intensely interested in the problems of ethics and religion with which the Bible deals; and however 'orthodox' or 'heterodox' they may have thought themselves, the Scriptural approach to these questions seemed to them to be of large moment. Into "Ferishtah's Fancies" Browning characteristically enough introduced some Hebrew quotations which, as he wrote to a friend, "are put in for a purpose, as a direct acknowledgement that certain doctrines may be found in the Old Book, which the concocters of Modern Schemes of Morality put forth as discoveries of their own."[1]

Considerable space might easily be given to this common debt which both poets acknowledge. Thus in "Locksley Hall, Sixty Years After" Tennyson quotes, —

[1] Sharp, *Life of Browning*, p. 182.

Love your enemy, bless your haters, said the Greatest of the Great;[1]

while in "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon" Browning sums up the play, and voices a similar Scriptural command in Thorold Tresham's dying words, —

Vengeance is God's, not man's. Remember me!

Both were fascinated by the story of Lazarus risen from the dead, and both have enshrined it in verse almost as haunting and as sure of remembrance as the original chapter in St. John's Gospel; Browning in "An Epistle," and Tennyson in Section XXXI of "In Memoriam." Browning, too, loved to echo the old prophetic preaching of sin and the need for repentance, touching it with a gleam of characteristic humour often, but yet content to leave it in a form that would bear pulpit utterance. Such, for instance, is the first section of "Ben Karshook's Wisdom."

"Would a man 'scape the rod?"
Rabbi Ben Karshook saith,
"See that he turn to God
The day before his death!"

"Ay, could a man inquire
When it shall come!" I say.
The Rabbi's eye shoots fire —
"Then let him turn to-day!"

In very much more musical as well as tragic verse Tennyson adapts the language of Scripture to the

[1] In less tragic form the same lesson is inculcated as explicitly in *Sea Dreams*.

purpose of his famous sermon in "Aylmer's Field" from the text, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." The poem is so compact of Biblical reference, phrase, and feeling as to make illustration difficult except one quote the whole. It would admirably serve the purposes of a college examination in ability to recognize and verify allusions to Scripture. A few verses must suffice.

Then came a Lord in no wise like to Baal.
The babe shall lead the lion. Surely now
The wilderness shall blossom as the rose.
Crown thyself, worm, and worship thine own lusts!
. . . . . .
In such a shape dost thou behold thy God.
Thou wilt not gash thy flesh for *him;* for thine
Fares richly, in fine linen, not a hair
Ruffled upon the scarfskin, even while
The deathless ruler of thy dying house
Is wounded to the death that cannot die;
And tho' thou numberest with the followers
Of One who cried, "Leave all and follow me."
. . . . . .
Thee shall thy brother man, the Lord from Heaven
Born of a village girl, carpenter's son,
Wonderful, Prince of peace, the Mighty God,
Count thee more base idolater of the two;
Crueller: as not passing thro' the fire
Bodies, but souls — thy children's — thro' the smoke.
. . . . . .
Friends, I was bid to speak of such a one
By those who most have cause to sorrow for her —
Fairer than Rachel by the palmy well,
Fairer than Ruth among the fields of corn,
Fair as the Angel that said, "Hail!" she seem'd,
Who entering filled the house with sudden light.

Tennyson was little disposed to choose explicit Scripture themes, though his "Rizpah" is a noble modern paraphrase of a Biblical episode. Browning, on the other hand, did some of his most memorable work, and appeals perhaps to his largest audience, in three great poems upon Bible characters, "Saul," Lazarus in "An Epistle," and St. John in "A Death in the Desert."

It is no part of my purpose, however, to make overmuch of this connection between Scripture themes or language and the work of these poets. The connection exists, and suggests the worth, to a poet's manner and matter both, of the world's greatest religious literature, to say nothing of the wider public assured to a writer who will express himself with skill upon great themes in language dear and sacred to multitudes of thoughtful people. The contact between religion and such literature as Browning and Tennyson represent becomes at once vital and essential instead of formal or incidental, when we begin to consider the themes to which they turned and the spirit in which they approached them. Both were philosophers; which is simply another way of saying that both looked out open-eyed upon the mysteries of experience and welcomed a challenge to their investigation. Both were essentially pure-minded and reverent men. This is not to deny in them the presence of nature's deeper physical instincts or a warmth of blood which often colours their verse. There was a rich vein of the

sensuous in both. "Lucretius" vouches for Tennyson here, as does "Fifine" for Browning; and there are passages in the latter's work which suggest his capacity as a painter of the horrible had he chosen to follow lower instead of higher instincts; so close akin are the sensuous and the cruel. Readers of "Sordello," for instance, will remember Salinguerra's fight with mob and fire at the gate of Vicenza, and how —

> The blood fries
> And hisses on your brass gloves as they tear
> Those upturned faces choking with despair.

This is perhaps the least unquotable of three episodes in the poem which for me are among the most grisly in our literature, fit to set beside the murder in Le Fanu's "Uncle Silas," Poe's "Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," and Kipling's "End of the Passage." That these two poets should have held such power to exalt and amplify the fleshly in strict control is a tribute at once to their individual characters and to their common art. It was possible to them because of their intense interest in life's greater issues.

I do not propose to attempt an exposition of the religious and ethical views set forth in their works. I desire, rather, roughly to appraise the value of religion to them as poets. Both, as I have indicated, were deeply occupied with problems of the soul. Tennyson won a great public by his essentially modern treatment of death, grief, doubt, and inex-

pugnable hope in "In Memoriam"; but it was a public which he had in some measure prepared to receive his message by such earlier work as "The Palace of Art," "St. Simeon Stylites," "The Two Voices," and "The Vision of Sin." These four early poems, with the "Ulysses," which in some respects I should place at their head, form an abundant answer to the critics who complain of Tennyson's lack of substance and accuse him of sacrificing matter to form. If there are greater themes than those suggested here, I do not know what they can be. "Ulysses" may fittingly head the list, because its haunting verse not only depicts shore, sea, night, and stars with exquisite beauty, but makes of the whole a setting for the figure of a symbolic man. Ulysses is not merely the dubious hero of the Odyssey; he is far more. Schelling somewhere says that "the Spirit has its Iliad, its tale of struggle with brutal and natural forces, and then its Odyssey, when out of its painful wanderings it returns to the Infinite."[1] The place of Ulysses in classical literature is comparable to that of Abraham in Holy Writ. Each represents man as the Pilgrim of the Universe. Abraham was turned out of doors by his vision of a higher faith, and went forth, "not knowing whither he went"; Ulysses, in Tennyson's poem, feels this same impulse to seek a larger world. The same spirit of adventure animates both

[1] I owe this quotation to Dr. A. M. Fairbairn. See *The Place of Christ in Modern Theology*, p. 212.

heroes; in one case exalted into the realm of religion, in the other moving upon what we blindly call a more 'material' plane; but none the less bespeaking the existence of a divine image or likeness in man. To use the old phrase, man "cannot be holden" permanently by mere circumstance. Ulysses is face to face with age; but there are still so many seas to be sailed, so many lands to be visited, so much to do and bear in the world, that he is impatient of rest and security. The very fact that there are dangers in the unknown for the lover of mere life to fear, adds an incentive to his restlessness. Many a man has achieved a difficult enterprise from a haunting fear in his heart lest he be afraid to undertake it; he has attacked it to justify himself to himself. It is the instinctive self-assertion of the regal element in human will. This cry of Ulysses, —

> I am a part of all that I have met, —

is underrun with the assurance that he is, after all, the regnant part. He is so conscious of the brevity of life's chance as to lament his three years' rest at home: —

> And this gray spirit yearning in desire
> To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
> Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

It is to be acknowledged that death closes all; and yet — and yet, there is something in Ulysses that challenges even that patent fact: —

For my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down;
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are:
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

This, early in life, was Tennyson's statement of a fundamental article in his faith which goes far to account for the wholesomeness of his influence. As a boy my acquaintance with the poem began when reading the late Sir Henry M. Stanley's address to his men as they set out upon their untried way through Africa. The adventure was a great and doubtful one; and inevitably the words of a courageous leader, dedicating himself as well as encouraging his followers, took on something of the complexion of the "Ulysses." The incident suggests the universal quality in Tennyson's best work, its unfailing soundness, its heartening power, and its fundamental kinship with religion. Practically all that he wrote from the day of "Ulysses" to that of "De Profundis" is instinct with this high notion of personality. That personality is a mystery does not disturb him; that it should always prove too big for the compass of our definitions rather en-

hances its dignity and worth. The fact that we cannot altogether comprehend so great yet intimate a thing, only makes it better worth our while to grasp at least the outskirts of its ways and learn what we may of its capacities and powers. As a philosophical riddle the question of free will may remain indefinitely beyond us; as a fact of experience we are obliged to treat man's will as a creative power. For the purposes of our life together we must suppose it to be free, at least within large limits. To Tennyson it seemed reasonable in the strictly scientific sense to recognize this mastery of circumstance as a legitimate attribute of a man's soul. The hypothesis which best fits life and conduct upon the present stage of existence is —

> This main-miracle, that thou art thou,
> With power on thine own act and on the world.

This is no less the burden of Christianity, which never makes light of the paradoxes of speculation or the puzzles of experience, but simply asks men to use the powers they have for the discipline of their instincts and passions and for the attainment of the highest ends. The essence of Christ's Gospel was that man should practically recognize and fulfil his relationship to God, and his power over a world which is meant to become a kingdom of God.

The early poems of "The Two Voices" and "St. Simeon Stylites" are admirable paraphrases

in modern language of the old cry of St. Paul conscious of the war in his members. "The Vision of Sin" is a replica of the Scriptural "mystery of iniquity." "Aylmer's Field," "Locksley Hall," and "Maud" all remind us of the miserable and often suicidal fraud perpetrated by him who would appraise his own life or that of another in terms of material possessions. "The Princess," though in lighter vein, is still inspired with something of the same thought that every life, without distinction of sex, should have scope for growth and self-fulfilment; but the poet's sound English sense speaks through it to remind his readers that this self-fulfilment is most likely to develop along the lines of that human experience which has become a second human nature.

"In Memoriam" is like a magic mirror held up to the heart and mind of its century. The fact that it is really a mass of related fragments may possibly have enhanced rather than diminished its power to reflect the broken lights which fell upon it. Those who base Tennyson's popularity upon his command of a mere prettiness of phrase, cannot, it seems to me, have looked beneath the surface of this poem. Here is man face to face with the world-old mystery of death; and with the no less compelling mystery of disappointed hopes and shattered plans, since death has broken in violently upon a life of promise instead of coming in the course of nature and in fulness of time. Moreover the integrity of such life

as remains is doubly threatened; first, by the fact of loss, and then by the revolution which the age has wrought upon faith. Elegy which sets forth death's sadness and sorrow's poignancy is as old as poetry; but it remained for Tennyson to depict the desolation of a heart not only bereaved of the object of its love, but threatened with bereavement of all sources of its hope. No poet of his century seemed to have so keen a sense for the inner meanings of its mighty scientific and critical revolutions. Tennyson makes good his claim here to a place among the great prophets and seers. Before the "Origin of Species" had made men conversant with 'natural selection' and the 'survival of the fittest,' and while the idea of evolution was yet general and undefined, he seems to have discerned by instinct the confusion which impended over the faith of his generation. Evolution was not yet the name to conjure with which it became in the sixties and seventies; but the shadow of its coming was discernible to Tennyson's eye. First among poets he saw the place which biological studies were to claim in the thought of the century and their family relation to religion.

"In comparing him with Carlyle," says Professor Tyndall, "I notice that the latter drew his imagery, for the most part, from what we call inorganic nature. Physics and chemistry were well advanced when Carlyle wrote, but modern researches in biology had scarcely begun. These latter fell into

your father's hands, and he has made noble use of them from 'In Memoriam' onward." [1]

Moreover the note of faith in "In Memoriam" is as truly modern as the picture of its doubt. There is no argument of the scholastic sort. The problem is approached more often after the traditional manner of Cambridge than of Oxford; the poet showing himself to be of closer kin to the Platonists than to Bishop Butler.[2]

Both Tennyson and Browning, in their dealing with religious problems, prefigure what is best and most suggestive in modern Pragmatism. The bereaved man finds his dearest ties broken, his hopes for the future in this world a mass of fragments, and his faith in another a chaos of uncertainties. What shall he do? Whence shall he seek comfort? Nature, viewed with the partial vision of the new biology, seems "to shriek against his creed." Man, speaking through the lips of M. Comte and the Positivists, would mock him with an abstract continuance of racial life wherein are to be found no traces of that personal entity which was his friend. Blank dogmatic atheism is but another and, if possible, an uglier name for madness. He is forced therefore to approach the problem of life's recon-

[1] "A Glimpse of Farringford," by John Tyndall, in *Alfred, Lord Tennyson*, vol. ii, p. 475.

[2] Those familiar with the *Life* will remember Tennyson's conversation with Mr. Gladstone upon the two Universities, vol. ii, pp. 490–491.

struction from the side of life's needs. In homely phrase, he must decide whether or not what he does know is to be worsted and put to confusion by what he does not know. Christianity has always given a simple but very positive and cheerful answer to this question. Man is meant to dominate the world; to read its record, to possess its substance, to set in order its confusions. Tennyson once said to Tyndall that, if he believed he were here simply to usher in something higher than himself in which he could have no personal part or lot, he should feel that a liberty had been taken with him.[1] The phrase is a pregnant one. No one can think with equanimity of men like Hallam and Tennyson, and no one is willing to think of himself, as representing nothing but a transitory crop planted merely to be ploughed in for the sake of enriching the earth which may then bear a better, — a sort of high-grade cosmic fertilizer. There is a spirit in man which resents this. "In Memoriam" evokes this spirit, questions it, makes it bear what witness it can to man's experience as well as to his needs; and then, with full recognition of the illimitable scope of the unknown, decides that, in light of the known, faith is the rational hypothesis for the guidance of life.

> That life is ever Lord of Death
> And love can never lose its own.

[1] *Alfred, Lord Tennyson*, vol. ii, p. 474.

This is, roughly speaking, Tennyson's constructive argument, not only in "In Memoriam," but throughout the remainder of his work. Only very rarely does any dogmatic note sound in his utterance of it. Quite as often it is only implicit; though as time passed he felt the natural impulse of age explicitly to emphasize his convictions. Hence poems like "De Profundis," "Despair," "In the Children's Hospital," — although it would not be fair to ascribe the argument of the Hospital Nurse unreservedly to the poet, — and most notably "The Ancient Sage," are primarily religious and even theological in their motive.

> O worms and maggots of to-day
> Without their hope of wings!

Thus "The Ancient Sage" restates the poet's conviction that the things of the Spirit are life's ultimate realities and that he who neglects them walks in a vain show. These poems set forth with compelling eloquence the truth that life depends on faith, and, lacking it, is bound to pine and dwindle on the one hand, or else go mad with hopelessness upon the other.

The "Idylls" represent the ethical or practically religious side of this truth. They have the same relation to a completely developed epic that "In Memoriam" has to a perfect elegy. Both are poems made up of related fragments, the difference being that the elegy bears this treatment better than the epic. The allegorical element in the "Idylls," more-

over, doubtless interferes in some degree with the development of the epic as a whole; but I do not think that the allegory was so overworked by Tennyson as the criticism of it has been by his critics. That the poems show "sense at war with soul" is so evident as scarcely to need statement. The reader will best catch their meaning and learn their lesson who contents himself with this simple announcement of their purpose and rests in it. All effort to identify characters with specific institutions or qualities befogs both the literary and the moral issues. No doubt the Lady of the Lake may represent the Church, but she is far more effective artistically and ethically as an incidental figure in Arthur's story than she can be as an Institution.

Meanwhile the "Idylls" justify their hold upon the world with every fresh reading. They are romantic in the best sense; pathetic, too, with much of the true Virgilian tears-of-things; musical beyond expression except by their own words; clean with an essential purity, although dealing explicitly with a tragedy in which a harlot and an adulteress have large part; and seasoned always with a common sense which, if it cannot supply the spice of humour, at least saves sentiment from degenerating into mawkishness. Much might be said upon this last point; because it has become the fashion to treat the "Idylls" as though their ideal were a sort of bloodless austerity. There are some to whom a red flower seems to offer as fitting a sym-

bol of blameless life as a white flower; and I confess to membership in that company; yet, barring the literal fact of the symbol's use,—and he must be captious indeed who really begrudges the lily its time-honoured office,—it seems to me that the preëminent lesson of the "Idylls" is very much the lesson of a robust and rational Christianity. A man's life consisteth neither in the things which he possesseth, nor yet in the things which he renounces; neither in luxurious wealth nor in ascetic poverty, but in self-fulfilment according to the will of God and the need of men. Arthur is a very high type of man; but his limitations are patent to us, and before he passed became evident to himself.

> "I found Him in the shining of the stars,
> I marked Him in the flowering of His fields,
> But in His ways with men I find Him not."

"Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control," Tennyson's early trinity of virtues, are highly developed in Arthur, but he lacks exactly this vision of God immanent in man, making all life sacred. Merciful he is, and humane in the narrower sense; but not with the humanity which flowers into sympathy and quick understanding of man's temptations and pettinesses. Hence it is—and the touch is a stroke of pure genius—that Arthur is sometimes thrown by Lancelot when jousting, but is always mightier than he in the field of genuine

battle. He represents the righteous man, pure in heart, a lion in courage, absolute in his allegiance to duty, whose goodness is yet touched with pallor. With a little of Lancelot's capacity for passion, the tragedy of his Round Table and his Queen might have been averted; but to have added this to all the rest would have been to write something other than the "Idylls."

In the poems as they stand we have a faithful and a marvellously beautiful picture of the higher man striving to dominate complex circumstance and bend it to the highest purposes. The complexity is as Protean and baffling as that of weather; the very forces which seem fair to-day beat him back to-morrow. The tragedy and the pathos appear less in the wilfulness wherewith evil men, and most notably one evil woman, Vivian, oppose all of good that the King can devise, than in the perversity of fate whereby, on the one hand, Guinevere and Lancelot are thrown together and led to mutual and widespreading ruin, and, on the other, the flower of the Round Table Knights are dispersed in a time of grievous need upon a chase after wandering fires.

The mystic vision of the Grail is not life's end. Ethereal souls like Galahad and Percivale's sister may see and profit by the revelation; it may come as a great reward to Sir Bors, willing to be blind to it if only Lancelot might see and be comforted; and a distant glimpse is vouchsafed to faithful Per-

civale: but better upon the whole seems the lot of the homely priest to whom Percivale tells his tale, and better far the lot of Arthur; since to him in the midst of his toilsome career there come —

> "Moments when he feels he cannot die,
> And knows himself no vision to himself,
> Nor the high God a vision, nor that One
> Who rose again.
>
> "So spake the King: I know not all he meant,"

says Percivale, acknowledging half unconsciously that, while the ascetic may hear an inspiring echo, the Voice itself speaks most often to the man in the midst of life's conflict.

Much might be made of the extent to which Tennyson lays Scripture scenes and language under tribute in the "Idylls." Sometimes a line like —

> If I lose myself, I save myself!

runs like a refrain through a poem, and sometimes an episode hinges upon the less explicit teaching of the Gospels. The Duke of Argyll was once walking in the poet's garden, when Tennyson, who had preceded him along a path, suddenly turned and blurted out, "I hate scorn." [1] Twice at least in the "Idylls" the same feeling that no man is to be treated with mere contempt,[2] finds utterance; once when Lancelot detects Modred playing spy, and again when Guinevere in her penitence says of Arthur, —

[1] *Alfred, Lord Tennyson*, vol. ii, p. 514.
[2] Cf. St. Matthew, v, 22.

"but he never mocks,
For mockery is the fume of little hearts."

So too, in Ulysses, the modern idea of faith as moulded by experience is illustrated by the lines: —

Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move;

and better still perhaps, though unconsciously, by the twelve windows in Merlin's great hall at Camelot which were emblazoned with the story of Arthur's wars: —

And all the light that falls upon the board
Streams thro' the twelve great battles of our King.

The subject cannot be left without some reference to Tennyson's pathos. A word however must suffice, not merely because of limitations of space but because the quality is too delicate to bear formal discussion. I should hesitate to say that Tennyson had a 'command of the pathetic.' If such a phrase mean anything it would seem to imply that he sometimes sat down with deliberate purpose to reach and wring men's hearts. Dickens, at his worst, was capable of this, and his facility at it would have damned him almost irretrievably had he not possessed very great redeeming qualities. Tennyson hated sentimentality, although the circumstances of "The May Queen" and "Enoch Arden" beguiled him into the edge of its territory. The appeal of "Enoch Arden" — and it has been more often and widely translated,

I believe, than any other of Tennyson's poems — is, however, the honest appeal of genuine tragedy very simply and naturally portrayed.[1] Tennyson's command of our hearts is far more potent than any mere ability to tell a pitiful story could justify. He had the mystic's sense of the fleeting unreality of the seen and temporal. Sometimes this finds explicit utterance, as in the words of one who —

> hath heard
> Time flowing in the middle of the night
> And all things creeping to a day of doom.[2]

Again, as in "The Palace of Art," he propounds to us —

> The riddle of the painful earth, —

and does it graciously enough to stir our hearts rather than our bile. But he is most genuinely poignant when simply echoing his own deep sense of the mystery of time's passing and earth's common joys, sorrows, and fidelities. Here, better than any other modern poet, he deserves his own tribute to Virgil,

[1] Walter Bagehot, whose critical touch is generally so firm and sure, certainly blunders in his criticism of Tennyson for endowing a fisherman-sailor with Enoch Arden's high qualities. Tennyson, like FitzGerald, knew the East Coast, and knew too that it is exactly among simple and often rude sea-faring folk that fine feeling and capacity for heroism are latent. As illustrating the poet's dread of effusive praise or too searching an inquiry into his private views, may be cited his first conversation with Frederick Robertson. He had already learned to admire the preacher and his work ; but fearful of too intimate an interview on this occasion he obstinately refused to discuss any other subject than *Beer*.

[2] Brooke, *Poetry of Tennyson*, p. 68.

All the charm of all the Muses often flowering in a lonely word.

It is this consciousness of himself as "in the world but not of it" that breathes through a song like —

> Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
> Tears from the depth of some divine despair
> Rise in the heart and gather to the eyes,
> In looking on the happy autumn fields,
> And thinking of the days that are no more.

Little as such beauty lends itself to analysis the most careless reader notes the lack of bitterness in the poet's sorrow. The tears are distilled from a beating heart rather than wrung from a broken one; and the despair, if despair it be, is still divine. Distance, loneliness, the flight of time, all things that accentuate a man's individual existence haunt this poet — but in the breast of their sorrow, hope always beats. The lines from "The Ancient Sage" are now familiar: —

> for oft
> On me, when boy, there came what then I call'd
> . . . . . .
> In my boy phrase "The Passion of the Past."
> The first gray streak of earliest summer-dawn,
> The last long stripe of waning crimson gloom,
> As if the late and early were but one —
> A height, a broken grange, a grove, a flower
> Had murmurs, "Lost and gone and lost and gone!"
> A breath, a whisper — some divine farewell —
> Desolate sweetness — far and far away —
> What had he loved, what had he lost, the boy?

One cannot but contrast this Sense of the Past, with its consciousness of loss but its instinctive insistence upon a gain to come out of the future which shall redress it, —

> As if the late and early were but one —

with the exquisite hopelessness of such verse as Mrs. Meynell's Threnody: —

> Beloved, thou art like a tune that idle fingers
> Play on a window-pane,
> The time is there, the form of music lingers;
> But O, thou sweetest strain,
> Where is thy soul? Thou liest i' the wind and rain.

Tennyson's demand and expectation of life, from "Ulysses" to "Crossing the Bar," is, on the other hand, —

> The wages of going on and not to die.

With his brother poet he nobly illustrates the truth of F. W. H. Myers's remark that, "In an epoch of transition and bewilderment great souls make the surest harbourage." [1]

Exactly these same wages for life's toil were demanded and expected by Browning. This view of life and death was implicit in all his work, and clearly uttered at its close in "Asolando." The difference in manner between the two poets is so marked and so easily emphasized to the point of contrast, as to blind the casual reader to their practical identity of

[1] "Modern Poets and the Meaning of Life," *Nineteenth Century*, January, 1893.

conviction and substance. Browning's humour, for instance, is as rich and frequent as Tennyson's is rare. Sometimes it fairly overdoes itself and becomes farcical, as in the section of "Sordello" in which St. John mistakes his own poor portrait for a picture of the Devil. Yet even in these cases, where we could desire greater restraint, the farce is a naturally luxuriant growth; it is never manufactured and then dragged in for effect. The two poets also stand side by side in the possession of lyric powers whose exercise could melt men's hearts. Browning used his gift less frequently than Tennyson, but when he chose to exercise it, the result was unforgettable.

> O lyric Love, half angel and half bird,
> And all a wonder and a wild desire —

remains at the end of the first section of "The Ring and the Book" to bear him witness. He, too, knew the "Passion of the Past" and prays, —

> That still, despite the distance and the dark,
> What was, again may be.

Generally, however, his recollection of the past is brisk and cheerful with assurance that its essence is still extant and remains his unfailing possession.

> May's warm, slow, yellow, moonlit summer nights; —
> Gone are they, but I have them in my soul.

These words, whatever their setting in "Pippa Passes," will describe his general attitude toward

past experience, as the other lines from "James Lee's Wife" represent his splendid confidence in the present and the future: —

> Rejoice that man is hurled
> From change to change unceasingly,
> His soul's wings never furled!

Of his pathos, I suppose that Pompilia, the child-wife and mother, is commonly reckoned to be the great exemplar. The heart must be hard indeed which fails to yield its reverent sympathy to her youth, innocence, suffering, and untimely death. Yet there is a certain softness of physical fibre about her that somehow manages to reach over into the realm of character; she is faintly touched with the negative quality which that other child-wife in "David Copperfield" incarnates so wofully. This is not to institute a comparison between Pompilia and Dora; the former of whom is one of the significant features in a great poem, while the latter is a chief blemish in a great novel. But the fate of Pompilia inspires a physical shudder; it is horrid rather than pathetic. One could have borne, perhaps, to see Mildred Tresham stabbed, had it been necessary to the tragedy of "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon"; she was of tragic mould; but Pompilia! — it is like reënacting the Massacre of the Innocents! Browning's pathos is most poignant when it is gentlest and simplest. The passing of St. John in "A Death in the Desert" makes no special demand upon us for any feeling beyond a gracious and thankful sadness; but the

poor Bactrian, who kept watch by the cave's mouth, grazing his goat upon the rags of herbage, and fully intent upon yielding up his life, if need arose, to shelter those within the cave — this man is secure of his meed of fame and tears. He was not equal to perpetuating the tradition of John's death; but he could for a moment interpose a humble life in order that the master might pass in peace, and his disciples gain time to receive his dying words.

> The Bactrian was but a wild childish man
> And could not write nor speak, but only loved.

The closing lines of the story, too, are marked by so sweet a simplicity as to compel the reader to wish that Browning had oftener exercised his gift in this direction: —

> Believe ye will not see him any more
> About the world with his divine regard!
> For all was as I say, and now the man
> Lies as he lay once, breast to breast with God.

Browning's friend "Waring"[1] once called him the "subtlest assertor of the soul in song," and the saying is as true as it is sibilant. No further answer than the multitude of Browning Societies need be given to those who assert or fancy that theology's day is past and that religion ceases to hold the attention of the thoughtful. Whatever tempted or inspired men; everything that enhanced or debased their personality; the mystery of their three score

[1] Mr. Alfred Domett.

and ten years and their insistent claim upon a life beyond that term, — all these things fascinated him and wrought themselves over into poetry in the alembic of his mind. "Paracelsus" and "Sordello" represent in their several ways the element of spiritual adventure to which religion invites us, and without which it degenerates into mere formality. "Saul" and "Cleon" speak of the inappeasable hunger of the soul for God and immortality. "An Epistle" and "A Death in the Desert" remind us of the inevitable appeal made by Jesus Christ even though He be considered as a mere incident or phenomenon of history. "Christmas Eve" and "Easter Day" are as frankly theological as Newman's "Apologia" or "Grammar of Assent." "Pippa Passes" and "The Ring and the Book" are far too great and comprehensive to be characterized in a sentence; but in them both, sometimes explicitly, and more often by suggestion, the poet echoes St. Paul's reasoning of "righteousness, temperance, and judgement to come."

Pippa's song, so often and unintelligently quoted as though it numbered Browning among the dogmatic optimists, really has a far deeper significance than that. It is the chance unreasoning utterance of a happy little working girl upon the morning of a holiday; it penetrates not the ears only but the fleshly hearts of an adulteress and the paramour who has just murdered her husband. Here lies the wonder of the thing; that this child's thoughtless

assertion, moved as she is to utter it by the appeal of springtime to her innocent heart, —

> " God 's in His heaven —
> All 's right with the world ! " —

should bring a murderer to himself, so that Sebald echoes breathlessly,—

> " God 's in His heaven ! Do you hear that ? Who spoke ? "

and a little later, speaking both of and to Ottima, he sets forth inimitably the old attempt of the flesh to strangle the spirit.

> " To think
> She would succeed in her absurd attempt,
> And fascinate by sinning, show herself
> Superior — guilt from its excess superior
> To innocence ! That little peasant's voice
> Has righted all again. Though I be lost,
> I know which is the better, never fear,
> Of vice or virtue, purity or lust,
> Nature or trick ! I see what I have done,
> Entirely now ! Oh, I am proud to feel
> Such torments — "

It is not exactly the sorrow of repentance, but rather the reassertion of manhood after a term of bondage to greed and lust. This is typical of Browning's method in using religious and ethical material. The two are inextricably mingled by nature, representing indeed but different aspects of one experience. They are among the fundamental things for which man has innate appetite. Every man when he is most himself recognizes that they concern him.

The poet rarely cares to assert this dogmatically, preferring to show it by example in taking such themes for his most telling work. He is careful, too, to admit the subtle complexities and difficulties as well as the great simplicities of religion. Sometimes the matter is dealt with half whimsically, as in the marvellously clever monologue of Bishop Blougram over his wine and walnuts; sometimes grotesquely almost to the point of caricature, as in "Caliban upon Setebos"; and yet again with a high and wistful seriousness, as by Cleon, and the Pope in "The Ring and the Book."

One great reason of Browning's early neglect and later vogue has been that he anticipated with so sure an instinct the analytical tendency of the latter half of his century, when science strove to bring all things in heaven and earth to the dissecting table.[1] Another lies in an extraordinary insight into the depths of man's soul which makes the reading of some of his poems seem like an anticipation of the day when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed. A third is to be found in his large use in argument of a philosophical method now particularly known as Humanism or Pragmatism. In "A Death in the Desert" St. John argues, to be sure, that if man were as certain of the worth of Christ as he is of the worth of fire, all would accept Him, there would be no room for doubt or question, and —

[1] This fact has been interestingly developed by Mr. Stopford Brooke in his *Poetry of Robert Browning*, p. 8.

Man's probation would conclude, his earth
Crumble.

Yet, after all, the poet is always recurring to exactly this argument. Religion is as necessary and wholesome to a man's soul as bread to his body. Some faith in God, Duty, Immortality, is as needful to the breath of his soul's life during this present winter of his discontent as is fire to his household's health. Bishop Blougram is a somewhat doubtful ally, to be sure, but he reaches a fundamental experience in saying, —

Belief's fire, once in us,
Makes of all else mere stuff to show itself;
We penetrate our life with such a glow
As fire lends wood and iron — this turns steel,
That burns to ash —

The secret of Browning's widespread and beneficent influence, as well as the guarantee of his fame, lies not merely in his art, grotesque and wilful as it often was; nor in his unique power of analysis; nor yet in his happy choice of a philosophical method which was about to become popular; nor even in the robust and good-humoured cheerfulness which gives a glow of genuine health to his work as a whole; but rather in the fact that, though a poet endowed with transcendent gifts, he was yet so representative a man in his feeling upon the deepest matters of doubt and faith.

The sum of all is — yes, my doubt is great,
My faith 's still greater, then my faith 's enough.

CHAPTER XII

DARWIN AND HIS PLOUGHSHARE

George John Romanes was the son of a Scots Presbyterian clergyman, resident in Kingston, Canada, as Professor of Greek in Queen's College. Following his birth, in 1848, the family left America and after several years of travel settled in London. Romanes received a rather desultory education, and finally went to Cambridge with the idea of fitting himself to take orders in the Church of England. This purpose he cherished for several years, but before taking a degree, found his interest enlisted so heartily by scientific studies as to change his plans, win a scholarship in science, and turn more or less definitely toward the profession of medicine. It was in the field of biology, however, that he was finally to do his life-work and gain a considerable recognition. I use his name to introduce this chapter, not because he is to be regarded as a Darwinian of unique gifts or authority, —although his gifts were exceptional and his authority eminent,— but because of a representative if not typical element in his experience. His first acquaintance with Darwin's books marked an epoch in his life. Circumstances eventually brought the

two men together, and, until the master's death in 1882, he had no more devoted disciple. This intimacy was indeed close enough to put us in Romanes's debt for some glimpses of Darwin's gracious simplicity of character which could ill have been spared. The younger man was, however, no unquestioning devotee. He accepted Darwin's great hypothesis as he accepted Herbert Spencer's philosophy, with a willing yet critical mind; and in due time made his own contribution to the doctrine of development under the title of "Physiological Selection." I have no especial competence to appraise its value, nor, indeed, to estimate the importance of any portion of Romanes's investigations in the field of nervous function and comparative intelligence.

It is less difficult to characterize his quality as a man; for he was singularly happy, not only by natural endowment, but in the circumstances of his short life. Well born and well bred, happily married and entirely well-to-do, with a rich nature which drank life in from all pure sources and imparted it generously, not only to his family and a host of friends but to a wider circle whose claims some men would have ignored, he represents almost uniquely the humaner side of that singular mixture of idol and bogey known to the modern world as a 'man of science.' His especial claim upon our attention is due to the significant cycle through which within about a score of years his

opinions seem to have passed. In 1873, in his twenty-fifth year, Romanes won the Burney Prize at Cambridge with an essay upon "Christian Prayer and General Laws." This was his first published book, and in it, almost as a matter of course, he upheld the orthodox views of the day. The book was, however, a herald of revolution. Its author had already become a convert to the great development theory then going forth conquering and to conquer; but though acquainted with Spencer's general exposition of it, he had not yet pondered the special application and illustration which it had received at the hands of Darwin. As this grew upon him, a profound change took place in his views. Five years after winning the Burney Prize he published, anonymously, "A Candid Examination of Theism," which had, however, been written several years earlier. In it he frankly faced the necessity of atheism, though with the confession that for himself it could be accepted with no equal mind.

The passage which laments his lost faith has been quoted so often as to be almost hackneyed; yet a repetition here is justified by its eloquent suggestion of the relation which is bound to declare itself between every great discovery in the field of science and man's religious nature.

"So far as I am individually concerned," he says, "the result of this analysis has been to show that, whether I regard the problem of Theism on the lower plane of strictly relative probability, or on

the higher plane of purely formal considerations, it equally becomes my obvious duty to stifle all belief of the kind which I conceive to be the noblest, and to discipline my intellect with regard to this matter into an attitude of the purest scepticism. And, forasmuch as I am far from being able to agree with those who affirm that the twilight doctrine of the 'new faith' is a desirable substitute for the waning splendour of 'the old,' I am not ashamed to confess that with this virtual negation of God the universe to me has lost its soul of loveliness; and although from henceforth the precept to 'work while it is day' will doubtless but gain an intensified force from the terribly intensified meaning of the words that 'the night cometh when no man can work,' yet when at times I think, as think at times I must, of the appalling contrast between the hallowed glory of that creed which once was mine, and the lonely mystery of existence as now I find it, — at such times I shall ever feel it impossible to avoid the sharpest pang of which my nature is susceptible." [1]

A distinguished journalist, Mr. W. J. Stillman, has left on record his belief that in the majority of cases a man will return, if time enough be granted, to the essential substance if not to the form of the religious faith in which his youth was nourished, however wide may have been his intermediate departure from it. To this law, if law it be, the 'rationalists' who still grieve over Romanes's course must go for comfort. He could not rest in the

[1] Romanes's *Thoughts on Religion*, Editor's Preface, pp. 28–29.

conclusions of his own "Candid Examination." While his interest in scientific study continued unabated, and his assurance of the value of Darwin's great hypothesis was never shaken, he found himself instinctively seeking a wider platform for thought and life than that from which he had proclaimed his scepticism. He made, or supposed himself to have made, an arrangement with his publishers by which no second edition of the "Candid Examination" should be published;[1] and by the time his Rede Lecture was delivered, in 1885, it became evident that his views had undergone considerable change.[2]

In 1889 he delivered an address at Toynbee Hall upon the Ethical Teaching of Christ, which contained these words: "Whatever answers different persons may give to the questions, 'What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He?' Every one must agree that 'His name shall be called wonderful.'" It seems a sufficiently harmless conclusion even for a sceptic, in view of the history of nineteen at least partially Christian centuries; but it was too much for some of the faithful, and brought Romanes a letter from an earnest agnostic lady protesting against attaching so much importance to the "Peasant of Nazareth."[3] His course was now pretty clearly determined, and it is scarcely too much to

[1] See *Thoughts on Religion*, p. 104, note.
[2] *Thoughts on Religion*, p. 31.
[3] *Life and Letters of G. J. Romanes*, pp. 231–232.

say that the chief interests of his remaining five years of life centred upon the work of which his "Thoughts on Religion" represent a rough but suggestive outline. His conclusion is thus stated: —

I know from experience the intellectual distractions of scientific research, philosophical speculation, and artistic pleasures; but am also well aware that even when all are taken together and well sweetened to taste, in respect of consequent reputation, means, social position, etc., the whole concoction is but as high confectionery to a starving man. . . . I take it then as unquestionably true that this whole negative side of the subject proves a vacuum in the soul of man which nothing can fill save faith in God."[1]

Romanes's experience has value for the student of Darwinism in relation to religious thought, owing to certain typical and universal elements in it. As the embryo during its few days or months of prenatal life roughly sketches the progress of organic development up to the plane upon which it is to live, so the three stages of his spiritual history at once reflected the general attitude of man face to face with new and embarrassing discoveries, and prefigured, at least in some degree, the spiritual history of his generation. The world at large may well take a century for the journey which this intense life

[1] *Thoughts on Religion*, pp. 160–162. I say nothing above about the return of Romanes into the communion of his Church, because I am unwilling to seem to make capital of him as a convert. His case is cited, as I have indicated, for quite another purpose.

effected in two decades. In saying this, I would not imply a prediction that the long expected 'reconciliation of science and religion' — one's gorge rises at the threadbare phrase — is to take place precisely as in Romanes's case. But it requires no very uncommon powers to discern that religion and physical science are likely not only somehow to survive, but to cultivate the art of living together. A *modus vivendi* has already been reached. The wonder really is, not that a state of fear and hostility so long existed between the theologian and the biologist, but that it was not more pronounced and prolonged. Each is illustrating the truth in the Hegelian formula, Thesis, Antithesis, Synthesis. Both, in the earlier stages of the evolution propaganda, were inclined to be dogmatic in stating their doctrines; each saw, or thought he saw, in the claims of his fellow the opposite and enemy of his own. It sometimes happens, however, that men oppose one another until a certain community of interest and mutual understanding springs up out of the conflict. An old and worthy adversary grows to be as necessary and almost as highly esteemed as an old and valued friend; until Bellona turns peacemaker in her own despite, and wins at least a momentary place among the children of God.

In the present case the conflict has been a source of education to both parties. The theologian has learned that the destruction of ideals and the extinction of life's beacons has no place in the plan

11625

of physical science; while its pursuit of truth is an eminently spiritual exercise, indissolubly linked to the health and well-being of religion. The fair-minded devotee of physical science has generally come to recognize in the persistence of religion a fact so significant as to be worthy of respect. If he be genuinely scientific in habit he must admit that the history and present experience of religion are matters bound to exercise the minds of thoughtful men; and that thus the theologian finds an abundant charter for his occupation. Even the extraordinary agility with which religious faith has adapted itself to new conditions, and the degree of success with which it has striven to assimilate new truth, are facts which have meaning. Granting for the moment that its agility has been sometimes almost acrobatic, and its assimilation but partial and dyspeptic, still the fact remains that such adaptation to changed circumstances is one of the notes of strong and deep-rooted life. No doubt all this is trying to a certain type of 'secular' mind. One cannot but feel for the vexation which introduces into secularist literature so much of the note of the common scold. Having laboriously slain religion at night, it is of course harrowing to meet him in the morning, coming with smiling front, as a bridegroom out of his chamber, and rejoicing as a strong man to run a race. Yet it is a fact for the scientific mind to take due account of; and as time has passed there has been an increasing disposition to do this with fairness and good temper.

Darwin himself set his disciples a great example here. No one accorded a more searching criticism to the theology of Romanes's "Candid Examination" than his father in the Gospel of Evolution.

"With regard to your great leading idea," wrote Darwin in 1878, "I should like sometime to hear . . . what you would say if a theologian addressed you as follows: —

"'I grant you the attraction of gravity, persistence of force (or conservation of energy), and one kind of matter, though the latter is an immense admission; but I maintain that God must have given such attributes to this force, independently of its persistence, that under certain conditions it develops or changes into light, heat, electricity, galvanism, perhaps even life. . . .

"'Again, I maintain that matter, though it may in the future be eternal, was created by God with the most marvellous affinities, leading to complex definite compounds and with polarities leading to beautiful crystals, etc., etc. You cannot prove that matter would necessarily possess these attributes. Therefore you have no right to say that you have "demonstrated" that all natural laws necessarily follow from gravity, the persistence of force, and existence of matter. If you say that nebulous matter existed aboriginally and from eternity with all its present complex powers in a potential state, you seem to me to beg the whole question.'

"Please observe, it is not I, but a theologian who has thus addressed you, but I could not answer him.[1]"

[1] *Life and Letters of G. J. Romanes*, pp. 88–89.

This passage is so characteristic in its frankness, modesty, fairness, and a simplicity so naïve as often to produce the effect of the most delicate irony, that it may serve to introduce its author into our discussion. The main outlines of his generally uneventful life are soon sketched. A grandson of the poet and philosopher Erasmus Darwin, and the son of a distinguished and highly successful Shrewsbury physician, Charles Darwin grew to young manhood without giving his family much assurance that he would attain to any position in the world higher than that of an amiable amateur in the lesser fields of science. Reversing the order of Romanes's plans, he began with his brother Erasmus the study of medicine, and afterward, on going to Cambridge, looked for some time toward the Church. It was his good fortune, however, to form a warm friendship with Henslow, Professor of Botany, who was not only a man of wide learning and progressive habit of mind, but of so keen a vision and generous a nature that he at once discerned something of Darwin's quality and did much to rouse his enthusiasm. Through the avenue of this friendship came the opportunity to join Captain FitzRoy and the Beagle in their memorable voyage around the world. The five years spent upon this expedition represent Darwin's sole physical adventure. After his return in 1836, his happy marriage, and his settlement at Down in 1842, he proceeded to justify his early statement to Captain FitzRoy: "My life goes on

like clock-work, and I am fixed on the spot where I shall end it."[1]

Here he gave to his "Naturalist's Voyage" the form which has won for it place and fame in English Literature[2]; here too he pursued researches, the results of which, when finally published as the "Origin of Species" in 1859, and the "Descent of Man" in 1871, went so far to revolutionize the forms of human thought. The phrase 'epoch-making book' has of late been generally given over to publishers' advertisements and to reviewers of the superlative sort; but it must needs be recovered and rededicated whenever reference is made to Darwin's work. Even now, when the results of his labours have so entered into the substance of our thought that in all departments of knowledge we take instinctive account of them, we find ourselves too near the period of upheaval to see its changes in exact proportion. Some idea of their magnitude may however be gained by any intelligent person who will reread the Recapitulation and Conclusion of the "Origin of Species," or the twenty-first chapter of Part II of the "Descent of Man," contrasting, as he does so, his own peace of mind with the mingled exhilaration and dismay caused by their first appearance.

[1] *Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, vol. i, p. 287, American edition.

[2] Its substance was published as Volume III of the *Journal and Remarks* in 1839; but the book which we know is the product of the revisions of 1845 and 1860.

The idea of derived instead of 'created' species had of course been more or less familiar to scientific students since the day of Lamarck. Indeed, one might go much further back, as Darwin does in a letter to Sir Charles Lyell: "Plato, Buffon, my grandfather, before Lamarck, and others, propounded the *obvious* view that if species were not created separately, they must have descended from other species."[1] Robert Chambers, in his "Vestiges of Creation," had done something to popularize the idea, though with grace and facility rather than accuracy; while Baden Powell had argued that the "Order of Nature," which was the title of his book, represented an unbroken series of events linked each to each by natural causes.[2] He also bore glad witness to the significance of Darwin's work when the "Origin" appeared. The central thought of Herbert Spencer's evolutionary philosophy had already been foreshadowed in his "Social Statics" and "Principles of Psychology," though the formal announcement in the "First Principles" waited until 1862.

Under these circumstances of preparation Darwin in 1859, all unconscious of the magnitude of impending results, put his ploughshare into the field. The figure is too mild, although admirably suited

[1] *Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, vol. ii, pp. 198–199.

[2] This book was published in the same year with the *Origin of Species*; but its main positions had been announced in the writer's earlier works, especially in the *Plurality of Worlds* (1853).

to the temper of the man. One might perhaps better say that he fired a train which was eventually to explode a multitude of cherished conventions in the world of thought. There is indeed a trace of Fate's irony in the fact that this man, who spent a lifetime of quiet toil in disclosing Nature's orderly consecutiveness, should have proved, in spite of himself, to be an agent of catastrophe. The intervening half-century has gone far toward silencing the turmoil. Its dust has settled and men discover, some to their comfort and others with chagrin, that the stars still shine and the pillars of earth are unshaken; but at the time and for long afterward many who were neither bigots nor fanatics feared that their dearest possessions were threatened. Some found a momentary satisfaction in the thought that a moral law which had proved too strait for their convenience was likely to go down in the confusion; others of honester and more constructive habit felt or tried to feel the elation of those who find themselves upon the site of an unbuilt city or the shore of a rich but unmapped land.

Darwin himself can scarcely be numbered in any one of the three groups. He had lived with his theory too long and intimately to be fearful of its consequences upon the one hand, or greatly elated over its prospects upon the other. His was a singularly gracious as well as judicial temper. None knew the objections better; none more frankly admitted the necessary limitations of the argument or the

gaps in its completeness; none consented to be instructed with a more exquisite humility; and none could be less dogmatic in stating, or declining to state, the philosophical and religious implications of his views. The Saints of Science are commonly supposed to be but a meagre company; yet while the old prophetic test of "doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God" has application, this man would seem to be worthy of a place among that or any other chorus of the Blessed. He has confessed that absorption in scientific studies robbed him, as life went on, of his natural taste for music and poetry; until the time came when he could scarce read even Shakespeare without effort. Since he was a preëminently truthful witness, we are forced to take his word for it, though not without a protest against the ungenerous use which has often been made of the confession. Darwin's self-depreciation must have seemed insincere in a less humble and candid man. As it is, we can only smile when we find him writing to a friend that facts compel him to conclude that his brain was never formed for much thinking,[1] and not long before his death, a similar note recurs in his reference to a recent journey through the Lake Country. "The scenery gave me more pleasure than I thought my soul, or whatever remains of it, was capable of feeling."[2] The simple

[1] Letter to W. D. Fox, *Life and Letters*, vol. i, p. 506. The reference is apparently to quantity rather than quality of thought.

[2] *Life and Letters of G. J. Romanes*, p. 103.

fact seems to be that Darwin was no absolute exception to the rule that one's —

> nature is subdued
> To what it works in, like the dyer's hand.

He unquestionably sacrificed much to his intense application to one line of study; and his conclusion that it would have been better for him had he kept up a daily acquaintance with music and poetry, is doubtless a sound one; but to make much of these confessions, or to infer from them that his nature shrank or grew meagre as time went on, would be as grossly unjust as the attempt which has sometimes been made to belittle Romanes's later experience by the false assertion that his mind became impaired.

It is true, however, that Darwin himself avoided so far as possible all discussion of philosophy and metaphysics; only by force, as it were, could he be dragged into correspondence upon the religious bearings of his theories. Yet he clearly foresaw that religion would of necessity be involved in the popular approach to his positions. He was unwilling to present the substance of the "Origin of Species" at the meeting of a learned society, because of his confidence that in the discussion which must follow the subject of religion would be brought in[1]; and in planning with Lyell for the book's publication he frankly raised the question of its "unortho-

[1] *Life and Letters*, vol. i, p. 499.

doxy."[1] His foresight was abundantly justified. Stevenson somewhere remarks, in speaking of Talk and Talkers, that "you can keep no men long, nor Scotchmen at all, off moral or theological discussion." Darwin himself had pondered upon the derivation of species and natural selection long enough to perceive that, in themselves considered, they were no more subversive of religious faith than were the "Principles" of Lyell, to which believers had in some measure accommodated themselves; and he would gladly have postponed this phase of the discussion. But the majority of his readers and the mass of those who gained their knowledge of his theories at second hand were all as Scotchmen in the matter. They would not be put off. When, at the famous Oxford meeting of the British Association, Bishop Wilberforce arraigned the new theory with characteristic assurance and rudeness, Huxley had some right to his exultant cry, "The Lord hath delivered him into our hand."

Both sides saw that the real issue before the mass of thoughtful people was a religious one. Many professional students of science, less combative by nature than Huxley, doubtless felt deep regret that the matter must be thus complicated. It was, they claimed, fundamentally a problem in biological method; a matter for unbiassed observation, experiment, and generalization; every question of a philosophical or religious nature which

[1] *Life and Letters*, vol. i, p. 507.

arose in the minds of investigators or expositors only beclouded the issue and clogged the path of progress. Their view was that of the mere professional man, and therefore cramped and inadequate. It is of course true that merely as a theory, the doctrine which the "Origin of Species" set forth needed the service of a candid and unbiassed biologist, and it was its singular good fortune to find in Darwin a student of this type; but it is no less true that, if a biological theory is to gain general acceptance and exercise a universal influence, it must show its importance to the wider interests of men. Biology in itself considered is no doubt a fascinating subject. Its conclusions excite a relatively mild interest among large numbers of men. But the interest is generally that which attaches to curious facts. It lacks the haunting and fruitful quality which belongs to far-reaching philosophical principles. Even discoveries like those associated with the names of Pasteur or Lister, which bear immediately upon the preservation of property or life, excite but a nine days' wonder, and then drop quietly into their places in the world of accepted circumstance. With matters which involve origin and destiny it is not so. These at once arouse man's deeper interests; though their terms be physical, they are felt to involve those elements in his being which he calls personal, ethical, and spiritual. They reach down to the conduct of life and up to its aspirations.

Though few men discuss them intelligibly, and in logically correct propositions, many argue over them and are subtly influenced in life by the conclusions — often erroneous enough — at which they arrive.

The debt of the Darwinians to the Bishop of Oxford is only less than that to Mr. Huxley. To argue, as Bishop Wilberforce did, against Natural Selection and the Derivation of Species, because the man who accepted these theories must look back to a monkey as his grandfather, was mere pitiable buffoonery; and yet, under the rude and unworthy speech, there was an element of saving truth, of even greater importance to the Darwinians than to their adversaries. The mere study of variation, emphasized and made permanent by Nature's breeding, until a new variety of marked distinction was evolved from the primitive rock-pigeon, must have excited but a languid interest in the world. Rules governing, and in a limited fashion explaining, these variations, might have been formulated without disturbing the public peace. But when the investigation touched man himself and seemed to involve him altogether, body and soul, past and future alike, at once there was widespread concern. All the time-honoured faiths and institutions of society seemed threatened; the most sacred instincts of the heart were in danger of denial; and as a result the theories of Darwin found both the publicity and

the criticism which they deserved. Darwin's work was great enough to merit and profit by attack. It is of course to be regretted that the attack should so often have been petty and prejudiced; but it is to be remembered that the defence and counter-attack were as frequently unworthy. The orthodox theologians had no monopoly of dogmatism; bell, book, and candle are soldiers of fortune, — they were enlisted in this controversy as eagerly upon the side of atheism and materialism as they had ever been in behalf of creation by divine fiat in six solar days. 'Scientists' were not wanting who stood ready to excommunicate all believers in religion from the congregation not merely of intelligent but of sincere men.[1]

The real leaders in the controversy were of larger calibre and higher type. Some, like Huxley, Tyndall, and Spencer were confessed 'agnostics'; others, like Wallace, Asa Gray, and Agassiz, not only recognized religion's claims but believed in its positive content. Among men of the first rank outspoken

[1] It is with much surprise and some genuine pain that the reader finds this note recurring persistently in so learned and in many ways so charming a book as Mr. Benn's recent *History of English Rationalism in the Nineteenth Century*. Mr. Benn is perfectly capable of presenting views or facts unfavourable to his own position, and sometimes does so with admirable fairness; but his method of dealing with great names like those of Mill, Darwin, and a host of others, and his repeated insinuations that their caution in promulgating unpopular views was due to fear, or their boldness to the security of assured position or private means, are in a tone worthy of Vivian.

preachers of unbelief like Clifford were few; and one cannot but wonder whether Clifford, had he lived, could have maintained his attitude of militant negation through middle age. But this is true of them all, — that it was their position with reference to religion which gave them their widest if not always their most intelligent public. The circle of readers who really grasped Tyndall's argument in the Belfast Address was small indeed in comparison with the multitude who were impressed by what they supposed to be its attack upon religion. The really competent students of Darwin's "Descent of Man" were but a handful in contrast with those who grieved with Miss Frances Power Cobbe over his theory of the origin of Conscience. Huxley's remark upon the "Origin of Species" holds true of the whole literature to which it gave rise. "The immense popularity which the 'Origin' at once acquired was no doubt largely due to its many points of contact with philosophical and theological questions in which every intelligent man feels a profound interest." [1]

Mr. Huxley's own fate is a case in point. Though a biologist of great attainments, he is known as a theologian to multitudes who would be puzzled to state a single contribution which he made to pure science. They know him as the promulgator of the hard-used word 'agnostic'; they remember his colloquy with Bishop Wilberforce; they have watched

[1] T. H. Huxley, *Darwiniana*, p. 286.

his truculent joy in slaying once more the much-enduring Gadarene swine; and in it all they have seen a theological controversialist of the keenest type, — one of the most bumptious and at the same time fascinating of preachers. It was a true instinct which led him to preach and print his "Lay Sermons." On the other hand the opposition of so eager and receptive a mind as that of Agassiz to the Darwinian hypothesis has commonly been ascribed to its preoccupation with certain religious views. There is truth in the claim, and one of Agassiz's most brilliant and influential pupils, himself an ardent Darwinian, has gone so far as to ascribe especial honour to his master upon exactly this ground. His reasoning is that the religious convictions of Agassiz were something far more than prejudices in favour of dogma, as they were certainly something higher than superstition. Religion was a great experience into which years of his life had gone. The fundamental articles in it had proved their value by practical experiment. The new view seemed to be so at variance with these articles that he could not admit its validity.[1] There has been a considerable tendency to deride such an attitude as timid and unscientific; and a corresponding demand upon men to enroll themselves beneath the banner of 'agnosticism' or else be branded as reactionaries. Agnosticism became a part of what Dr.

[1] Le Conte, *Evolution and its Relation to Religious Thought*, p. 45, 2d edition.

Johnson used to call the "clamour of the time," and spoke with the authority of fashion. The fashion is likely, however, to prove a passing one. Huxley's adjective 'agnostic' has its useful place, but it is too feeble and complexionless a term for the designation of thoughtful men. No word the most significant syllable in which is negative can hold the allegiance of the wise for very long. 'Alpha privative' may serve as motto for the protest of a decade; it can scarcely lead the progress of a century. "Do not let what you do know be overthrown by what you do not know," is an old and well-approved dictum of experience, to which the gospel of 'agnosticism' ran counter. It was a counsel of negation, and common sense could not remain subject to it. Religion stood for something so real and vital that men had been found to live by it and to die for it in every generation. They could not dismiss it at the word of a scientific dogmatist; nor could they rest in presence of a theory presented even with the sweet reasonableness of Darwin's until its philosophical and religious implications had been examined.

The hesitation which men showed in presence of Darwin's conclusions was therefore not altogether unreasonable. Two things were necessary before Evolution could do its needed work. One was that its evidences should be recanvassed and its arguments restated under the stress of acute and searching criticism; the other that time should be given

for men to see what was and what was not implied in its acceptance.

The insistance of religious writers upon this latter point was in itself right. Their manner of insisting was often altogether wrong. Sometimes they were timid, as though the evolutionist might undermine the foundations of faith by catching God in self-contradiction; sometimes bold with an uncharitable assumption that the new theories were committed to atheism and materialism. The timidity and the boldness were alike unprofitable and baseless. "The doctrine of Evolution, therefore, does not even come into contact with Theism, considered as a philosophical doctrine. That with which it does collide is the conception of creation, which theological speculators have based upon . . . the opening of the Book of Genesis." Such is Mr. Huxley's claim as set forth in the chapter which he contributed to Darwin's "Life." [1]

Quite as baseless was the assertion that Evolution was but another name for 'materialism,' if indeed that term have any intelligible meaning. Here again we may call Darwin and Huxley to witness. The reader will remember the former's searching questions to Romanes upon the publication of the "Candid Examination." The latter is even more specific. He claims that, while the old doctrine of design and purpose in nature is quite inadequate, there is a wider teleology which is not antagonized by the doc-

[1] Vol. i, p. 556.

trine of Evolution but is actually based upon its fundamental proposition.[1] He would substitute the word 'powers' for 'forces' in speaking of the potency seemingly resident in the molecules, and insists that 'matter' and 'spirit' are but names for the ultimate cause of the things we see.[2]

Nor has any one presented more forcibly than Huxley himself the inevitable suspicion with which thoughtful men saw the first advances of the theory of development to its place of dominance. Its apparent conclusions, he said in 1868, weigh —

"like a nightmare, I believe, upon many of the best minds of these days. They watch what they conceive to be the progress of materialism, in such fear and powerless anger as a savage feels, when, during an eclipse, the great shadow creeps over the face of the sun. The advancing tide of matter threatens to drown their souls; the tightening grasp of law impedes their freedom; they are alarmed lest man's moral nature be debased by the increase of his wisdom."[3]

There is a common notion that Huxley himself felt this fear to be justified. He showed so much of the joy of conflict in argument with his fellow theologians of more conservative habit, as to lead careless readers to the conclusion that he was a 'materialist,' and a denier of all spiritual function or life.

[1] *Life and Letters of Charles Darwin* (chapter by Professor Huxley), vol. i, pp. 554–555.

[2] *Lay Sermons, Addresses, and Reviews*, p. 143.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 142–143.

This is far from the truth. His disclaimer of 'materialism' was emphatic. His attitude upon the great question of man's freedom and responsibility may again be best suggested by his own words.

"Philosophers gird themselves for battle upon the last and greatest of all speculative problems: Does human nature possess any free, volitional, or truly anthropomorphic element, or is it only the cunningest of all Nature's clocks? Some, among whom I count myself, think that the battle will forever remain a drawn one, and that, for all practical purposes, this result is as good as anthropomorphism winning the day."[1]

In another connection he speaks of the "definite order of the Universe — which is embodied in what are called, by an unhappy metaphor, the laws of Nature."[2]

There is a deep significance in this recognition of the fact that language does not cease to be metaphorical and figurative when summoned to the service of science. The "laws of Nature" are but metaphorical and figurative statements after all, as really, even though not so largely, anthropomorphic as any principle of the theologian. The mind and the experience of man is still the measure of the world. He cannot be forbidden to speculate in what he terms the realm of the spirit without suffering from limitation in the world of so-called science; and

[1] *Lay Sermons*, "The Scientific Aspect of Positivism," p. 164.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

science in its turn will always be indebted, for its introduction to multitudes of men, to those teachers who insist upon discussing its principles in their relations to man's present conduct and future destiny. The great popularizers of science are always in some degree theologians. No Darwinians in America have had a wider or more respectful hearing than Asa Gray, Joseph Le Conte, and John Fiske. All dealt constructively with the relation between the new theories and the genuineness of man's religious needs. Scientists, of the sort who insist upon their right to a capital S, are inclined to resent the inclusion of the late Professor Drummond in their company. They prefer that he be remembered in the words of the Saturday Reviewer as one "who affected checked tweeds and the society of Lord Aberdeen." The fact remains, however, that Drummond was a keenly intelligent student of science; that he was gifted with unusual powers of exposition; that he had an almost unique experience of the ethical and spiritual struggle which, during his short career, marked the university life of both Britain and America; and that he brought to his work as a popular teacher and preacher very genuine convictions of the significance of modern scientific theories upon the one hand, and of the reality of religious experience upon the other. "Natural Law in the Spiritual World" and the "Ascent of Man" may continue to be treated rather cavalierly by professional students of science; none the less these volumes, with

such books as Professor Fiske's "Nature of God" and "Destiny of Man," and Professor Le Conte's "Evolution and its Relation to Religious Thought," have done an incalculable service in familiarizing men with the methods and the general conclusions of modern science in such a way as to connect these discoveries rationally with the great underlying experiences of life. The gain to the cause of religion itself has been equally obvious. A thoughtful writer has recently observed that "the only thing that is fatal to a religion is the conviction that it has no basis in the nature of things."[1] The fear which arrayed some religious men against the new theories was largely due to a suspicion that religion was threatened with precisely this divorce. Time has gone far to reassure all except those who fancy religion to be immune from the necessities of change and growth.

Under the changed conditions induced by scientific thought men have refined and enlarged their idea of God. They thought of Him once as a Wonder-worker, or Creator-by-fiat, and they were jealous for Him as one might be jealous for the skill and mysterious resource of a sleight-of-hand performer. They feared lest God might be 'found out.' The last half-century has taught them that the love of rational processes and a determination to use the slow methods of growth are divine attributes worthier of adoration than any mere ability to amaze

[1] Prof. John Watson, *Philosophical Basis of Religion*, p. 174.

and mystify. So far from finding God out, the research of the student has tended rather to widen the horizon of mystery; but to assure him at the same time that wherever he goes along the well-worn paths of the known, or out upon his voyages of adventure into the unknown, he may confidently expect to find Creative Power at work in orderly and reasonable fashion.

This assurance has reacted upon man's estimate of himself in the interests of a higher and saner faith. The discovery that the earth was among the most insignificant of planets tended for a time to make man the object of his own contempt. It seemed the height of presumption that he, who represented but a pinch of cosmic dust, able to retain corporeal shape and unity amid the flux of circumstance for a few brief days, should aspire to knowledge and dominion, or should lay claim to a destiny. Yet the very century which accentuated man's littleness at the same time demonstrated the range of his powers. His mastery of physical nature during the last hundred years will long serve to distinguish that epoch. Its bridging, mining, and tunnelling, its reduction of the sea to a universal highway which men can travel with assurance and in safety, its harnessing of steam and its annihilation of time and space through its very partial acquaintance with electricity, are indubitable history. The inevitable conclusion is being borne in upon him that he will find no region of the Universe foreign to his reason. Whether

he continue to dwell in this little planet, or be transplanted to some more dignified abode, the world about him is likely to see itself still reflected in his mind. Whatever the Creative Power immanent in the world may be, His methods of working appear to be cognate to the mind of man. They often puzzle men by their greatness; they always yield to the mind's attack, however, when a sufficient foundation of experience has been laid for it to stand upon.

This assurance which man has won out of the adventure of science emboldens him to renew certain old claims upon the Universe. He feels that he has a right to his own integrity; that is, to a certain wholeness of life and experience for which three score and ten years do not suffice. Having once tasted food for mind and soul he is as little disposed as was Oliver Twist to be put off with a single helping. Though the beadles of science and religion stare, and conventional voices cry out upon his audacity, he will, often no doubt awkwardly enough, insist that he was made for life instead of death, for faith instead of unbelief, for conquest rather than defeat. He will refuse to be put to confusion by circumstance. He will reiterate as his Magna Charta the passage in Hebrew tradition which bids him "replenish the earth and subdue it"; and persist in regarding his claim to the venture of religion as strengthened rather than invalidated by the teaching of science.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DOUBTERS AND THE MYSTICS

It is said that preachers are most inclined toward themes of loss and sorrow in their youth. Then, more than in later years, they aspire to set forth the contradictions and uncertainties of life, and to bring mourners into vital touch with springs of comfort. In this attempt they sometimes illustrate one of the very contradictions that oppress them, as out of their seemingly unharassed experience they essay to deal with deep and harrowing things. The incongruity, humourous as it often seems, is, however, more apparent than real. Many men who have had a full share of danger and defeat may be found to confess that their days of deepest anxiety came in the relatively sheltered and outwardly placid period of youth. The fears of childhood are often unique in their intensity; its burdens heavier than those of later life; its loneliness more desolating. Nor is the reason far to seek. It is the intelligent child who feels most keenly his inadequacy to circumstance, and it is the youth who is most conscious of the uniqueness of experience. Later on the man learns how great a store of resources and compensations life may furnish; and he per-

ceives at the same time that the problems which baffle him are the problems of every age, his burdens are those under which other men have staggered, and his path, however rugged and lonely, yet proves to be —

Worn of frequent feet.

The difficult situations of youth bode irrevocable disaster; those of maturity, with its more philosophic mind, as often whisper between their threats the old Virgilian solace, "Perhaps even these things it will some day be helpful to remember." Children within speaking distance of their parents still sometimes fear the dark; and youth, with years of goodly life before it, has as naturally and as perversely sung of death, parting, and faith's eclipse. It is a part, one suspects, of that revulsion of feeling which all men know who try their 'prentice hand at a new trade, — even the trade of living, — only to find the easy tricks of it transformed into vexations at the touch of their inexperience.

Be this as it may, however, the fact remains that the most haunting songs of doubt and disillusion have been sung by men well under forty. Clough and Matthew Arnold in their different styles are eminent illustrations of what I mean. One cannot pass to a consideration of their work and the sources of their influence, however, without regret that lack of space excludes a group of half-forgotten poets, like the Chartist, Ernest Jones, whose "Songs of

Democracy" deserve a place beside, if not above, Elliott's "Corn-law Rhymes"; Charles Mackay, whose simplicity still retains some power of real refreshment; the irreproachable Tupper, with his sure faith in the popular appetite for platitude, and his facility in feeding it; and "Festus" Bailey. The last named antedated, as he outlived, his fellows, and still advances claims to the notice of posterity. In a recent critical notice Mr. James Douglas has collected a considerable number of passages from "Festus," which certainly help to bolster his enthusiastic praise of the poem.

> And age but presses with a halo's weight,

may be admitted to be a worthy line, which Mr. Douglas has succeeded in matching with a fair array of peers. Yet "Festus" as it has come down to us, expanded by numerous additions, fattened, as it were, upon the choicer morsels of younger and less successful brethren, is likely to remain an essentially unreadable poem. There are fine lines; the poetic adventure essayed is inspiring; the style is often worthy the attempt; — still the thing is dreary. The reader finds himself wondering at the reason for twelve English and thirty American editions; and is driven to seek his answer in the fact that Bailey dealt in a large, free, and forceful way with the perennial theme of man's origin, destiny, and accountability to God. A comparison with Milton is inevitable — and of course disastrous.

The "Devil's Sermon" in Book Five reminds the reader of the address of Satan to Beelzebub; but it is Satan modernized, belittled, and robbed of his steadfast philosophy of rebellion.

> Think ye your souls are worth nothing to God?
> Are they so small? What can be great with God?
> The sun and moon he wears on either arm,
> Seals of his sovereignty.

There is good reasoning — by suggestion — here; the metaphor is bold and fine, after a barbaric sort; but the design as a whole lacks Milton's large epic quality as completely as its expression misses the majesty of Miltonic blank verse. "Festus" proclaimed a goodly number of little heresies — at least they were thought to be heresies in 1840 — out of which many readers doubtless snatched a fearful joy; and it set forth a genuine evangel, defined by the author himself as a "belief in the benignant providence of God, in the immortality of the soul, in the harmonized gospel of faith and reason combined, and in the just, discriminative, and equitable judgement of the spirit after death by Deity."[1]

It was the possibility of such truth as this that haunted Clough. In some respects he seems to me to embody uniquely the higher traits of English character. The late R. H. Hutton was insistent upon his essential kinship to Chaucer; and Clough has indeed much of Chaucer's tolerant, humourous,

[1] Quoted by J. H. Brown in Miles's *Poets and Poetry of the Century*, p. 474.

brotherly outlook upon the works and ways of men. But almost as good a case could be made out for his spiritual relationship to Bunyan as the inspired Tinker uncovers his soul in "Grace Abounding." Professor James, in his recent lectures upon "Pragmatism," would divide his fellow-men into two groups according to their possession of a 'tough' or 'tender' conscience. The division is at once suggestive and unsatisfying; but granting its validity, both Bunyan and Clough must find place, side by side, among the men of not merely sensitive but hypersensitive conscience. Both possessed wholesome natures. Both were humane in the Chaucerian sense. But Bunyan, convicted of sin, found himself under necessity of bringing each commonest affair of life to the test of Sinai with its thunders. God's frown darkened the ground where he played tip-cat, and the lightnings of Heaven's wrath threatened to course down the very bell-ropes with which he loved to ring. There was no question of doubt in the modern sense. The Seat of Authority was sure, and he lived in such close relation to it as gave awful import to the minutest incident of life. If ever a man stood consciously "naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do," Bunyan was that man.

Nearly two hundred years had elapsed when Clough found himself in the midst of another period of religious unrest no less momentous than that of the seventeenth century. The difference was that,

while Bunyan gave a singularly responsive conscience over to excess of belief, Clough lent his to excess of doubt. In matters of the spirit, Clough was like a naturally hearty and full-blooded man who should become so convinced of the septic peril lurking in all food and raiment as to go hungry and cold. At times he was filled with a desire to proceed even further, and there are some utterances which make him seem like a counterpart of the St. Bartholomew in Milan Cathedral, standing, a grewsome wonder of quivering muscle and tendon, flayed, and with his skin over his arm. Yet he was saved from the sentimentality of Rousseau, the querulousness of Heine, and the self-pity of Amiel, by his humour and his love of physical exercise. Since it was his to be —

> brought forth and rear'd in hours
> Of change, alarm, surprise, —

it was well that he should have been a runner and swimmer of distinction, as well as one of the best goal-keepers on record; and it was very well that he should have had an eye clear and sane enough to discern the whimsical as well as the heart-rending incongruities of life. The note of spiritual strain and stress reaching to the point of agony is ever recurrent.

> To spend uncounted years of pain,
> Again, again, and yet again,
> In working out in heart and brain
> The problem of our being here; —

this was the occupation of no small part of his life; the lines may almost be said to codify his strenuous creed of doubt. But it was not, after all, the ultimate and really determinative thing in either mind or heart. As beyond the gods of Olympus there existed a half-discerned Fate which finally overruled them, so behind Clough's doubt and self-questioning there lay an instinctive trust in the veracity and sanity of man's experience. Compelled by circumstance to doubt, he yet recognized faith to be the soul's normal and healthy exercise. It is not well, however, that life's great problems should be settled tyrannously or by force. He felt the temptation to this solution, and asked, —

> O may we for assurance' sake,
> Some arbitrary judgement take,
> And wilfully pronounce it clear,
> For this or that 't is we are here?

No, we assuredly may not; — and yet, —

> When all is thought and said,
> The heart still overrules the head;
> Still what we hope we must believe,
> And what is given us receive;
>
> Must still believe; for still we hope
> That in a world of larger scope,
> What here is faithfully begun
> Will be completed, not undone.

The same thought was uttered with great beauty and feeling in his prayer "Qui Laborat Orat"; it

came to rather daring and sarcastic speech in his modern version of the Commandments: —

> Thou shalt not kill; yet needst not strive
> Officiously to keep alive;

and it bloomed into such humour and tenderness in a little poem entitled "The Existence of God," as to give it an almost unique place in our literature.

> "There is no God," the wicked saith,
> "And truly it 's a blessing,
> For what He might have done with us
> It 's better only guessing."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "There is no God, or if there is,"
> The tradesman thinks, "'t were funny
> If He should take it ill in me
> To make a little money."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> But country folks who live beneath
> The shadow of the steeple;
> The parson and the parson's wife,
> And mostly married people;
>
> Youths green and happy in first love,
> So thankful for illusion;
> And men caught out in what the world
> Calls guilt, in first confusion;
>
> And almost every one when age,
> Disease, or sorrows strike him,
> Inclines to think there is a God,
> Or something very like Him."

With the same "wide and luminous view" he surveys the life pictured in his long poem "The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich"; to judge at least from so much of it as the intolerable hexameters and the barbarous title permit us to read.

> He went; his piping took a troubled sound
> Of storms that rage outside our happy ground;
> He could not wait their passing, he is dead.

It was fitting that Clough should have been thus commemorated by Matthew Arnold in his noblest elegiac poem, "Thyrsis"; for between the two men there was not only a warm friendship but a wide community of experience. Both have been jauntily numbered among 'unbelievers'; yet it is doubtful if any two poets of their century better illustrate the vital connection between literature and religion, or bear more unimpeachable testimony to the fact that, however poetry may seem to regard the forms of faith, it can never get on for very long without faith's essence. No candid reader of their writings is likely to deny that religion was a paramount concern of both and a chief source of inspiration in their work. To Clough it —

> Was great comfort and yet greater grief.

There was something almost passionate in his adherence to the themes of faith, whether for affirmation or denial. Arnold was capable of more marked detachment of manner, especially in his poetry. The plaintive note is frequent; the poet's voice

seems thin, and his complexion touched with pallor. Yet the plaint is so restrained and so free from exaggeration; it is voiced with such admirable art, and with such genuine poignancy, as to give to some stanzas place among the most haunting verses in our language. Unlike Clough, however, Arnold was able to wait the passing of the mid-century storms. It is true that, after Clough's marriage and settlement in a drudging public office, his life flowed on so serenely as to give promise that he too had at last found harbour; but he died at forty-three. Arnold lived to sixty-five and did the greater portion of his positive work in prose after forty.

In many respects he was the true spiritual son of his father. Thomas Arnold had little lightness of touch. The smarting cuticle of erring Rugby boys and the famous paper on "The Oxford Malignants" testified to his policy of 'thorough' alike with cane and pen. Yet his discipline was as free from all taint of cruelty as was his scholarship from pedantry. He was simply a good and exceedingly able man so mightily in earnest as to be in some slight danger of cultivating energy for its own sake. His eldest son, as often happens, swung to the other extreme in manner, though he never forfeited allegiance to the ideals of his childhood. Indeed in some respects he may be said to have supplied the necessary complement to his father. Arnold *père* would have contended that if a bush were to be beaten to start a hare it should be done seriously,

and with a zeal which it was no affectation to call religious. Arnold *fils* loved to say that he found the serious people of his day "beating the bush with deep emotion, but never starting the hare" at all; and, as Mr. Gosse has happily remarked, he made the discovery of the hare his object.[1]

It was all done so blithely, however, that multitudes of serious people questioned his sincerity of intent. But it is interesting and quite germane to our present purpose to observe that this note of blithesomeness so eminently characteristic of his later prose is almost wholly lacking in his poetry. One need only contrast his more serious prose works like "Culture and Anarchy," or "Literature and Dogma," with the Obermann poems to see at a glance what is meant; while the fooling of "Friendship's Garland" is among the most excellent in the language. He loved to quote his critics when they thought themselves to be keenest upon him. One ponderously accused him of lacking "a philosophy with coherent, interdependent, subordinate and derivative principles"—a charge which the object of it delightedly admitted, and turned gleefully to his own purposes. No doubt his playfulness and gift of irony sometimes carried him well beyond the lines of good taste, and occasionally over the bounds of decency. A man need not be very orthodox to feel the gravity of his offence in the matter

[1] *Illustrated History of English Literature*, Garnett and Gosse, vol. iv, p. 307.

of the "Three Lord Shaftesburys," for instance; yet the lapses were mere incidents after all in the exercise of a very great and rare literary gift.

The most casual reader of the early poetry or the later prose must perceive how natural was Arnold's use of the themes and language of religion. At least eight of the fourteen sonnets included in his collected poems deal with religious subjects; and among them "East London" is perhaps the most characteristic.

> 'T was August, and the fierce sun overhead
> Smote on the squalid streets of Bethnal Green,
> And the pale weaver, through his windows seen
> In Spitalfields, look'd thrice dispirited.
>
> I met a preacher there I knew, and said:
> "Ill and o'erwork'd, how fare you in this scene?" —
> "Bravely!" said he; "for I of late have been
> Much cheer'd with thoughts of Christ, *the living bread.*"
>
> O human soul! as long as thou canst so
> Set up a mark of everlasting light,
> Above the howling senses' ebb and flow,
>
> To cheer thee, and to right thee if thou roam —
> Not with lost toil thou labourest through the night!
> Thou mak'st the heaven thou hop'st indeed thy home.

Beside such verses as these there should be set the well-known stanzas from "The Grande Chartreuse," "Obermann," and "Obermann Once More," which depict faith's eclipse; though it is always to be remembered that some of the saddest, most haunting, and most often quoted of these lines are put by the poet into the mouth of the author of

"Obermann"; they do not profess to voice his own personal views. His moods no doubt reflected them; they seemed to be in some sense an echo of the doubting mid-century mind whose influence the poet felt so keenly; yet it would be a grave mistake to fancy that even in the most negative period of his poetry Arnold thought of himself as a preacher of negation.

"My poems represent, on the whole," he wrote to his mother in 1869, "the main movement of mind of the last quarter of a century, and thus they will probably have their day as people become conscious to themselves of what that movement of mind is, and interested in the literary productions which reflect it." [1]

The next generation justified his prophecy. It took a half-morbid satisfaction in thinking of itself as—

> Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
> The other powerless to be born.

When men would picture to one another the change that was passing upon faith they naturally had recourse to Arnold's simile,—

> Achilles ponders in his tent,
> The kings of modern thought are dumb;
> Silent they are, though not content,
> And wait to see the future come.
> They have the grief men had of yore,
> But they contend and cry no more.

[1] *Letters*, vol. ii, p. 10; June 5, 1869.

It is but partly true, since the "kings of modern thought" have been as communicative, nay, sometimes as vociferous, as thinkers of an elder day ever showed themselves; not least so when, like Carlyle, staggered by the greatness of our mortal way, they have seen fit to fill volumes with their cries of "Silence!" Yet after all, it is an admirable picture of a mood which most thoughtful people have known as they looked out upon the welter of new experience wherein, during the last fifty years, old landmarks threatened to be either buried or swept away forever. This same prophet, however, saw quite as clearly that on our modern journey through the wilderness the true leader and saviour must be a man of faith.

> Servants of God! — or sons
> Shall I not call you? because
> Not as servants ye knew
> Your Father's innermost mind,
> His, who unwillingly sees
> One of his little ones lost —
> Yours is the praise, if mankind
> Hath not as yet in its march
> Fainted, and fallen, and died!

The lines are taken from "Rugby Chapel," and might be matched by passages from his letters, to show in how real a sense Arnold felt himself to be his father's son. Thomas Arnold's treatment of verbal inspiration was thought by many to be quite as revolutionary as Matthew Arnold's views of justification by faith, in "St. Paul and Protestantism."

Yet the latter was sure that his view would prevail against like opposition and, as he wrote to his mother, "with a like safety to true religion."[1]

These letters abound in expressions of an ambition to give more intelligence and reality to the religious convictions which play so great a part in human affairs.

"It will more and more become evident how entirely religious is the work I have done in 'Literature and Dogma' [he wrote to his sister in 1874]. . . . For it is my belief, at any rate, that I give something positive, which to a great many people may be of the very greatest comfort and service. And this is in part an answer to what you say about treating with lightness what is matter of life and death to so many people. There is a levity which is altogether evil; but to treat miracles and the common anthropomorphic ideas of God as what one may lose, and yet keep one's hope, courage, and joy, as what are not really matters of life and death in the keeping or losing of them, this is desirable and necessary, if one holds, as I do, that the common anthropomorphic ideas of God and the reliance on miracles must and will inevitably pass away. . . When I see the conviction of the ablest and most serious men round me that a great change must come, a great plunge must be taken, I think it well . . . instead of simply dilating . . . on the plunge's utterness, tremendousness, and awfulness, to show mankind that it need not be in terror and despair, that everything essential to its progress stands firm and unchanged."[2]

[1] Nov. 13, 1869; *Letters*, vol. ii.

[2] Letters of Oct. 2 and November (?), 1874; vol. ii.

As the title of "Literature and Dogma" suggests, he recognized the vital relation which literature bears to religion, and illustrated the matter by a very cogent criticism upon the late Lord Salisbury.

"Religion he knows and physical science he knows, but the immense work between the two, which is for literature to accomplish, he knows nothing of, and all his speeches at Oxford pointed this way. On the one hand, he was full of the great future for physical science, and begging the University to make up her mind to it, and to resign much of her literary studies; on the other hand, he was full, almost defiantly full, of counsels and resolves for retaining and upholding the old ecclesiastical and dogmatic form of religion. From a juxtaposition of this kind nothing but shocks and collisions can come. . . . All this pressed a good deal upon my mind at Oxford, and made me anxious, but I do hope that what influence I have may be of use in the troubled times which I see are before us as a healing and reconciling influence.[1]"

For this office of peacemaker he had some very high qualifications: an earnest purpose, a keen intelligence, genuine good temper, a quick sense of humour, and a rare turn for banter in which the sting of irony was generally, though not always, mitigated by kindliness. No English essayist of his century has better illustrated those felicities of style which we ascribe to the French: keenness, swiftness, aptness, and lucidity; and the lesson was needed in

[1] To his Mother, June 25, 1870; *Letters*, vol. ii.

a day when Anglo-Saxons in general and Americans in particular were in danger of exalting German clumsiness and ineptitude into a sort of fetich. Repetitious he may sometimes have seemed to be; but the repetitions were generally of phrases which served him as a refrain or chorus. They were significant in themselves and perfectly adapted to grip the memory. Hence he became the master phrase-maker of his generation. "Sweetness and light"; "The Philistines"; the doctrine of "the remnant"; the company "of those who would live in the Spirit"; "Hebraism and Hellenism": these phrases suggest how keen was his insight, and how ethical his temper; but rich as many of them are in religious content, they fail to measure the saturation of his mind with Biblical and devotional thought, or the degree in which his style reflected it. "St. Paul and Protestantism," or "Literature and Dogma," might be expected to utter the language of religion; but its speech proved just as needful to the purposes of "Culture and Anarchy." There the devotional precepts of Bishop Wilson recur so frequently that an eminent scientific reader supposed Wilson to be a figment of the author's own imagination; and the concluding words of the Introduction, written when the essays were published in a volume, sums up the whole matter both for Literature and for Life.

"'If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them!' — the last word for infirm humanity will always be that. For this word, reiterated with a

power now sublime, now affecting, but always admirable, our race will, so long as the world lasts, return to Hebraism; and the Bible, which preaches this word, will forever remain, as Goethe called it, not only a national book, but the Book of the Nations. Again and again after what seem breaches and separations, the prophetic promise to Jerusalem will still be true: *Lo, thy sons come, whom thou sentest away; they come gathered from the west unto the east by the word of the Holy One, rejoicing in the remembrance of God.*" [1]

It is difficult to pass on to the concluding section of this chapter without a word concerning James Anthony Froude. His literary career furnishes both a parallel and a contrast to that of Matthew Arnold. It was as stormy as Arnold's was placid and urbane, and grew out of a violent spiritual struggle to which Arnold seems to have been upon the whole immune. Froude was like Arnold, however, in his recognition of religion's fascination. He could not let it alone. The "History of England" is a great Protestant pamphlet, in which his case is so overstated as to invite a revulsion of feeling. The "Short Studies" are shot through, now with genuinely religious, and now with sectarian feeling; and even a fragmentary book of travel like "Oceana" — another pamphlet, be it remembered, though in the interests of imperialism — does not escape the religious influence. Froude seemed to be an incurable spiritual dyspeptic, with all a dyspeptic's perverse and abnormal

[1] *Culture and Anarchy*, p. lx.

appetite for the things most certain to disagree with him. There was much in the orthodoxy of his day that Arnold could neither stomach for himself nor abide for others; but he had a sure discernment "for the things by which men live"; [1] he saw them in a high light, and he gave them positive and lucid expression. This happy faculty was denied to Froude. Religion, and the principles of individual and national conduct, claimed his keenest interest. He could dogmatize about them very eloquently; he probably could have died for his convictions with respect to them; but he could not keep them in the light, or discover the elements of their comfort. He always saw the pillar of cloud and fire so near as to find himself either befogged or daunted; Arnold viewed it in sufficiently true perspective to catch its guiding purpose.

The relation between the doubter and the mystic is entirely a natural one. Just as one of the by-products of the work of 'rationalist' and 'secularist' associations is likely to be an occasional outburst of superstition, so the age which makes much of dubious inquiry into the sources of faith is bound to breed a certain non-rational, if not irrational, type of faith. Heart and will refuse to be put permanently out of commission by the tyranny of the

[1] He loved to quote bits of the Old Testament like this in his familiar letters. Cf. Letter to M. Fontanes, June 29, 1883; *Letters*, vol. ii.

reasoning faculty, especially when, from inadequate premisses, it insists upon moving toward negative conclusions. I am aware that modern psychology declines to recognize this three-fold division of the soul; but there is a something in experience which corresponds to it, and drives us, either to these expressions, or to attempt the discovery of their parallels. "Low grades of being want low objects; but the want of man is God." Man may dispute until the end of time about his definitions of God and his methods of approach to Him; but he pretty steadfastly declines to be satisfied with the modern creed of agnosticism: "God is so great — if there be a God — that He is none of my business." The more dogmatic the negation, the more absurd the form of assertion is likely to prove. Now and then the contradiction is emphasized by some delightful inconsistency in a single character, and one finds Matthew Arnold himself guilty of the irreverence of the "Three Lord Shaftesburys" on the one hand, and on the other resolutely turning to the East during the Creed, when worshipping in Harrow Chapel,[1] even though the clergy neglected the observance. It was not a meaningless or uncandid act. Arnold felt deeply the appeal of services of worship. They stood for something real and vital in the experience of men. He believed that some of the ideas underlying them, however, were mistaken and inadequate. These he did not hesitate to criticise; but he

[1] *Matthew Arnold*, by G. W. E. Russell, p. 261.

was at the same time so confident that the impulse toward faith and its expression was normal and necessary, that he begrudged the giving up of well-established forms as heartily as he deplored the excesses of the ritualists. His attitude raises a smile because the world at large knows him as a critic so much better than it knew him as a worshipper.

The very fact of the emphasis placed by him and his generation upon criticism would lead us to expect a corresponding emphasis by others upon unquestioning belief. Sometimes this was frankly dogmatic, as in the case of Lord Shaftesbury, and the straiter sects of Evangelicals, Dissenters, and High Churchmen. Occasionally it was instinctive and mystical, as in the case of Christina Rossetti. Her contributions to literature were neither of an extent nor of a type to justify large notice here. Yet she not only illustrates the haunting power which religious mysticism gives to poetry, but serves as a connecting link between the mysticism of religion and that new influence in art and literature represented by her brother Gabriel and the Pre-Raphaelites. A mystic may be a person of clearly defined or of utterly hazy religious convictions. The word 'mysticism' has been vulgarized, as so many great words are, until in newspaper parlance it has degenerated into a term of half-patronizing contempt. The clairvoyant, the medium, and the wizard who peeps and mutters, are supposed to represent it. So are those who seek

strange gods and rites out of the 'mystic East.' The dreamer of dreams and seer of visions, especially if he be given to exploiting his revelations for the sake of gain or notoriety, is assigned to the same company. These misrepresent mysticism, however, very much as fanaticism and superstition misrepresent religion. Exactly as some men have what we call a 'genius' for physics, chemistry, or mathematics, which enables them to reach at a bound conclusions toward which other men must needs plod, so in the realm of spirit some would appear to possess a discernment which gives to the spiritual a reality denied to the visible and tangible. There are men whose instincts with reference to the possible applications of a mysterious force like electricity are more significant than the laboured formulas of their fellows. The instinct reaches its conclusion by a leap; but, having arrived, it will, if it be sane and serviceable, begin to look at once for the rational connection between its points of arrival and departure; It gladly awaits the endorsement of experience; yet not always. A mechanic may sometimes be found whose questioning finger moves with mysterious assurance to the seat of trouble in a halting machine, and who treats the plodding reasoner with a sort of contempt. The measure of his contempt is, of course, the measure of his limitation. If he despise reason and the processes of logic, he is so far forth to be regarded with suspicion; but such are the contradictions of personality that he does not

therefore invalidate his use as a mechanic. He may combine exceptional gifts for the swift comprehension of a mechanical problem with a very meagrely developed nature. Understanding machines with almost uncanny sympathy, he may understand little else adequately. It is neither necessarily nor commonly so, but the thing is conceivable.

The mystic in his simplest form is the man with an instinct for the realities that underlie appearance. His instinct may be true, deep, and keen, leading him to momentous conclusions; or it may prove so fatuous and ill regulated as to end simply in dabbling and pretence. There are little and great souls here as elsewhere. The great souls, like St. John or St. Theresa, trust their instincts at the same time that they insist upon their coördination with large and well-defined principles of life. St. John exulted in his vision of the Word made Flesh; but no vision was worth much, except the man who saw it loved his brother, and translated his love into brotherly acts. St. Theresa sat at times before a window which seemed to open into Heaven itself; but when she arose from beholding the glory, it was to prove to the world her possession of great and beneficent practical gifts. In true mysticism there is rarely any element of the grotesque or the bizarre; never any strangeness for the sake of the strange; but rather a realization of that larger world of which the visible and tangible frame of our experience is but the husk. Sometimes the realization is intense and over-

powering; sometimes but a haunting conviction at the heart of life. The risen Lazarus in Browning's "Epistle," with his abnormal sensitiveness to the possible issues of his boy's chance word, and his relative indifference to the gathering Roman armies, is an extreme instance of the former; Wordsworth, with his keen sense of the frame of things wherein his daily life was set, — the mountains, streams, flowers and weather of Westmoreland, — and his occasional glimpses through it of —

> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things,

represents a far more normal type.

The appeal of mysticism to the imagination is of course immediate; its large use of the symbolic belongs to its very nature; and its tendency toward literary expression is therefore natural.

The mysticism of Christina Rossetti represents a somewhat extreme form of the nineteenth-century type. Inheriting æsthetic talent of a high order, almost as naturally she seems to have entered into possession of an unquestioning faith. She was exceptionally gifted, too, in respect both of imagination and an eye which observed the world of flower, bird, and insect with keenness and humour.

> The mouse paused in his walk
> And dropped his wheaten stalk;
> Grave cattle wagged their heads
> In rumination;

The eagle gave a cry
From his cloud station;
Larks on thyme beds
Forbore to mount or sing;
Bees drooped upon the wing;
The raven perched on high
Forgot his ration;
The conies in their rock,
A feeble nation,
Quaked sympathetical;

all this in fellow-feeling with Eve's penitential grief. The connection between sorrow of heart for sin and the wonder of nature's interrupted course is characteristic of the mystics in general, and of Christina Rossetti in particular. Practically all her work is religious; "Goblin-Market" is a sort of parable, and so colloquial a piece as "No thank you, John" has its reference to the mystery of Earth's sorrow and its need of cure. A poem like "From House to Home" serves as an admirable illustration of the response which so many poets have made to the music of Scripture language, and the skill which Miss Rossetti had in versifying it.

Although to-day I walk in tedious ways,
To-day His staff is turned into a rod,
Yet will I wait for Him the appointed days
And stay upon my God.

Even in "Sing-Song," the nursery-rhyme book dedicated to the infant son of Professor Cayley of Cambridge, verses may be found which breathe the very breath of the Spirit.

Who has ever seen the wind?
Neither I nor you:
But when the leaves hang trembling,
The wind is passing thro'.

Who has ever seen the wind?
Neither you nor I:
But when the trees bow down their heads,
The wind is passing by.

There is sometimes, too, a tendency toward overwrought humility that may seem to accord better with the intensity of her Italian blood than with her English speech.

Give me the lowest place: or if for me
That lowest place too high, make one more low
Where I may sit and see
My God and love Thee so,

savours a little of exaggeration and of feeling cultivated for its own sake; just as the question and answer,—

Does the road wind up-hill all the way?
Yes, to the very end.
Will the day's journey take the whole long day?
From morn to night, my friend,

seem to overemphasize the sombre and unrelenting features of experience.

Both the Rossettis tended to make too much of the dreamy and anæmic side of mysticism, and so far forth represented a decadent phase of it. Christina's religious faith was, to be sure, vigourous enough upon the dogmatic side. Her brother,

Dante Gabriel, was careless of dogma, but responsive to the art values of religion, and to some of those features in experience which welcome religion's appeal. His "Death Parting" for instance, which begins, —

> Leaves and rain and the days of the year
> (*Water-willow and wellaway*),
> All these fall and my soul gives ear,
> And she is hence who once was here
> (*With a wind blown night and day*), —

not only illustrates the old poignancy of the sorrow of parting, which has been the theme of poet and preacher since literature began, but exemplifies too the half-mystical device (one is tempted to call it pseudo-mystical) of symbolizing this feeling by a refrain whose meaning, if it have any, is only that of a rhythmic sigh. The whole Pre-Raphaelite school tended in this direction of musical but fragile languor. The frequent beauty of the result could not permanently keep it from decay, and the thing finally degenerated into the absurdities of æstheticism and the sinister *grotesquerie* of Aubrey Beardsley and the "Yellow Book." But this was not until it had produced notable results of a substantial and beneficent type, both in literature and art. To speak of the work of Holman Hunt, Watts, and Burne-Jones is beside my present purpose. Nor can I stop to characterize the contributions of Mr. Watts-Dunton to poetry and criticism, beyond remarking that his Essay upon the "Renascence of

Wonder" is one of the sanest and most generous appreciations of the deeper relations between literature and the life of man's soul which the closing century produced.

In "Soothsay" Rossetti exhorts his fellow-mystics in this fashion: —

> To God at best, to chance at worst,
> Give thanks for good things, last as first.
> But windstrown blossom is that good
> Whose apple is not gratitude.
> Even if no prayer uplift thy face,
> Let the sweet right to render grace
> As thy soul's cherished child be nurs'd.

The doctrine is wholesome; the simile in the third and fourth lines obscure, with a sort of laboured obscurity for which the whole school had a perverse appetite. They preached simplicity, and then elaborated it, sometimes ruggedly and sometimes daintily, until it ceased to be simplicity at all.

Among the brethren of the 'rugged' school William Morris stands preëminent, — a fine and often noble, though not always gracious figure, amid the literary and social leaders of his day. He had, what every revolutionist ought to have, Tennyson's 'Passion of the Past' — though it was not Tennyson's Past. It would be going much too far to claim for him any clear historic sense, or any literary gift of quite the first order. He saw the past of Northman and early Saxon by the

glamour of the Saga's light; and even the later English life of the historic middle age he idealized. This was done partly at the instance of his zeal for handicraft, and partly, it would seem, from his intense love of the material face of England, her woods, streams, and fields, which led him to dream of them as they must have existed in other days, with a sort of ecstasy. The most casual reader of "The Folk-mote by the River," with its description of the sturdy mowers going forth long before dawn to cut the grass upon the Elders' Mound, about which the oppressed people were to gather and plan local revolution, will remember how redolent it is both of morning's freshness and of a people's need. The inspiration is as real as that of Shelley's "Skylark," though of mundane instead of celestial quality.

So what I have called his "Passion of the Past" has little of the Tennysonian poignancy. It is generally so robust as to suggest the robustious. Hallbiorn and Snaebiorn, for instance, both love Hallgerd. Hallbiorn wins her; but finding her still cherishing a fondness for his rival, and loth to leave her father's for her husband's home, transfixes her with his sword and rides away. Snaebiorn pursues, overtakes, and slays him after a mighty struggle; and then himself seeks refuge in sailing westward from the Iceland which is the scene of such tragedy to —

A grave beneath the Greenland snow.

The tragedy is real enough. There is the inevitable refrain to mark time's passing and sorrow's presence, —

> So many times over comes summer again,
>
> . . . . . .
>
> What healing in summer if winter be vain !

But in spite of this the fighting goes with such gusto, and the 'business' of the tragedy is so heartily managed, that the effect of slaying men is almost as cheerful as that of mowing grass. Morris was so tremendously energetic as Poet, Socialist, and Handicraftsman, that his product too often bore the marks of haste. He impressed himself in the manner of a devoted steam-engine rather than by the haunting power of the still small voice. His was one of those natures which seem to have little time for religious thought and no patience with religious observance. It would be an affectation to attempt to trace a 'religious element' in his work. Yet the place which Greek and Norse mythology occupied in his poems, and the influence of the Sagas upon his style are worth noting; while his overmastering zeal as a champion of the oppressed, a reformer of bad industrial conditions, and a social revolutionist, brought him into vital touch with essential religion. It is here that he illustrates my thesis of the literary worth of the religious impulse; for among the most memorable work that Morris did is that in which he sets forth the burdens, the rights, and the hopes of plain people. "The Burghers' Battle" is a war-

song, but one which Peace Societies might well reprint.

Thick rise the spear-shafts o'er the land
That erst the harvest bore;
The sword is heavy in the hand,
And we return no more.

. . . . . .

Across our stubble acres now
The teams go four and four;
But out-worn elders guide the plough,
And we return no more.

And now the women heavy-eyed
Turn through the open door,
From gazing down the highway wide,
Where we return no more.

. . . . . .

And crops shall cover field and hill
Unlike what once they bore,
And all be done without our will,
Now we return no more.

Look up! The arrows streak the sky,
The horns of battle roar;
The long spears lower and draw nigh,
And we return no more.

In poems like "The God of the Poor," "The Day of Days," "A Death Song," and "Hope Dieth; Love Liveth," he preached his gospel of social revolution, and usually with a spirit of confidence and good temper. The temper is stern, however, but all the more effective in its sternness because it refuses to be violent. Here, for instance, is the arraignment of the rich by the poor, and the refrain which voices

their determination to strive until the end for more equal conditions.

We asked them for a life of toilsome earning,
They bade us bide their leisure for our bread;
We craved to speak to tell our woeful learning;
We come back speechless, bearing back our dead.
Not one, not one, nor thousands must they slay,
But one and all if they would dusk the day.

They will not learn; they have no ears to hearken;
They turn their faces from the eyes of fate;
Their gay-lit halls shut out the skies that darken.
But, lo! this dead man knocking at the gate.
Not one, not one, nor thousands must they slay,
But one and all if they would dusk the day.

Mazzini somewhere says that there can be no religion without a new sense of the unity and solidarity of the human race.[1] In poems like "The March of the Workers" Morris gives his own stirring version of the same truth. It is not expressed in the accepted formulas of religion; but it echoes the preaching of Christ, and its real though broken music finely symbolizes the troubled efforts of society toward a better harmony.

On we march then, we the workers, and the rumour that ye hear
Is the blended sound of battle and deliv'rance drawing near;
For the hope of every creature is the banner that we bear,
And the world is marching on.

Hark the rolling of the thunder!
Lo the sun! and lo thereunder
Riseth wrath, and hope, and wonder,
And the host comes marching on!

[1] Cf. G. A. Johnstone Ross, in *Hibbert Journal*, July, 1908, p. 763.

In writing down the name of Edward FitzGerald, one is very conscious that he refused to be included in any formal class or category. Yet there is a sense in which he belongs to this chapter, since his real introduction to the world was by means of Omar, doubter and mystic both. There is something almost ludicrous in the enormous vogue which FitzGerald's quatrains won. Their workmanship, subtlety, and boldness merit all that can be said in their praise; their future is secure; but the true FitzGerald lover is tempted to think that this must be in spite rather than because of the extravagant fashion in which Omar Khayyám Clubs have been formed, variorum editions and Latin translations issued, and levant bindings crushed into the service of publicity. I have been asked strange questions about the puzzling little book in drawing-rooms where it lay for ornament's sake; and I could wish that FitzGerald might have lived to hear of the commercial traveller who confessed that, despite all efforts, he could not keep clear the distinction between Omar Khayyám and Hunyadi Janos.

That Fate which the quatrains celebrate could scarce have devised a more whimsical irony than the disinterring of this recluse, with his petulance and patience, his rudeness and tenderness, his doleful marriage and his steadfast affiance to the fisherman, "Posh," his admiration for Dickens and his loyal friendship with Thackeray, his wholesome

and never-to-be-forgotten love of the German Ocean and George Crabbe's poems; his plaid shawl, low shoes, short trousers, shuffling gait, and incomparable letters. So determined was the man himself upon burial alive in the seclusion of the East Anglian coast towns that Mr. Aldis Wright, with his library of letters, and Mr. Thomas Wright, with his volumes of biography, seemed at first like body-snatchers. Yet of all the poets discussed in this chapter, his, it is safe to say, is the most affectionately remembered name, unless we except Clough, and FitzGerald will be known to a thousand where Clough is read by a score. No doubt his eccentricity adds spice to the feast he spreads before his guest. But beyond that there was a personality which, speaking occasionally through the poems, and habitually through the letters, tempts the reader to share Thackeray's confession that FitzGerald was his best-loved friend.

There is no need to inquire curiously into the secret of his charm; but certain elements of it are described in saying that he had an 'understanding heart.' Recluse though he was, he saw, with something of a mystic's instinct, into the pervading trouble of his time; not only saw it, but felt for it with a deeper sympathy than any sentimentalist could fathom. The note of pathos is not unlike that in his friend Thackeray; sounded only occasionally, but then with such simplicity and restraint as to make it doubly memorable. There is a stanza

in "Bredfield Hall" not readily forgotten by those who know old houses and something of the ties that in country places bind home and church and passing generations to one another. The various occupants of the Hall are made to live and go their appointed ways before us, —

> Till the Bell that not in vain
> Had summoned them to weekly prayer,
> Called them one by one again
> To the Church — and left them there!

This same instinct for the deeper experience and meaning of common days led FitzGerald, in his adaptation of Omar, to depict inimitably the strangely mingled zest and satiety of the third quarter of his century. Men had their old-time appetite for the Wine and Song of Life; yet Life's contradictions thrust their way more persistently than ever to the banquet table. Their curiosity was at once fed and whetted by physical discoveries that were making the age famous; yet the ultimate and really significant questions of the heart were as clamant as of old; though their utterance was hampered, and their burden therefore increased, by a school of thinkers who would, if they could, have denied them utterance at all. It is when men are told that the instincts of their hearts are nonsense and should be foregone, that they fall into a mood wherein Omar's jovial cynicism seems like a gospel to them; not because he brings them any particular news of deliverance, but rather because he

diagnoses their ailment and voices their inarticulate feelings. In a day when men still thought about religion, but did not know whether as intelligent men they could claim the right to think about it very much longer, it chimed admirably with their humour to hear this old-new poet singing, — and with rare music, —

> Myself when young did eagerly frequent
> Doctor and Saint, and heard great argument
> About it and about: but evermore
> Came out by the same door wherein I went.

Some among them found their recurrent moods interpreted by the poem's fatalism; others were glad to hear their feelings of blind rebellion voiced by such stanzas of defiance as that which flings Man's forgiveness at Fate's head. Volumes of so-called theology, the natural children of a too lusty Calvinism, were summed up in —

> "Why," said another, "some there are who tell
> Of one who threatens he will toss to Hell
> The luckless Pots he marred in making — Pish!
> He 's a Good Fellow, and 't will all be well."

FitzGerald's day produced no more telling argument against sheer materialism than the humourous perversity of this poem. I would not debase it to a beast of burden by loading it with a moral, yet none who knew FitzGerald could have read the "Rubaiyat" without seeing in them the finer original of W. E. Henley's rather coarse —

Let us be drunk, and for a while forget,
Forget, and ceasing even from regret,
Live without reason and in spite of rhyme.

What Henley meant, if indeed he meant anything beyond the perverse face-value of his words, I do not undertake to say; but FitzGerald was clear-eyed and large-hearted enough to appreciate the grim banter of his own work — perhaps the most telling example of *reductio ad absurdum* in our literature.

CHAPTER XIV

THE HEYDAY OF MINOR POETRY[1]

This title sounds like an ungracious introduction to a study of recent English poetry; and when the reader perceives that such masters of their art as Swinburne and George Meredith must consent to introduce it, he may even count it sacrilegious. The phrase 'minor poetry' is never, I believe, quite grateful to the ears of poets. Mr. William Archer eschews it altogether as a "supercilious catchword," and entitles his interesting study of contemporary verse, "Poets of the Younger Generation." He is certain that the taint of contempt attaches to it and that it has a depressing and sterilizing effect.[2]

From all suspicion of contempt I would at once purge myself. 'Minor poetry' represents a condition rather than a critical aspersion; or, if criticism be implied, its object is as likely to be the critic or the public as the poet. There is great authority for the wisdom of choosing at first an inconspicuous place, and the young poet has no worse enemy than

[1] Incorporated in this chapter are portions of an article by the author published some years ago in the *Bibliotheca Sacra*, under the title, "The Religious Significance of Recent English Verse."

[2] *Poets of the Younger Generation*, Introduction, pp. 1–2.

the eulogist, who, upon the strength of a slender volume or two, would thrust him unbidden into the choir of Immortals; since nothing is more fatal to poets or poetry than anti-climax.

He is indeed an unappreciative reader who denies or belittles the extraordinary wealth of poetic gifts which the last half-century has put at his disposal. Here are verses to delight and to amuse; to instruct, to soothe, and to inspire, — most of them, moreover, the work of finished craftsmen as well as of inspired singers. The thing they lack is — to use a hackneyed phrase — the power to compel. I would not deny that this note of compulsion is sometimes sounded and the power exercised. Who of us has not been compelled to go his mile with some new poet, and rejoicingly girded his loins for twain, — only to discover, however, that his guide was the pilot of a stage in life's journey, rather than the Greatheart who sees pilgrims through. Let due honour be paid to these men. They are no "idle singers of an empty day." Their seriousness, and the real distinction with which they play their parts, are beyond cavil. Yet they impress us as generally with their limitations as with their powers. Sometimes it is a limitation of range, and sometimes of vision; but more often it is a lack of depth.

Let me cite at once the two names which offer the chief exceptions to this criticism, — the names already mentioned of Mr. Swinburne and Mr.

Meredith. In the case of George Meredith, I believe the exception to be real if not apparent; in the case of Mr. Swinburne somewhat more apparent than real; and for these reasons. When we apply our test questions to the scope of their work, — and here the volume of it is to be taken into account; to the extent of their vision, which should include the width of their sympathies; and to their ability to sound the depths of experience, Mr. Meredith answers the last two triumphantly and the first respectably. The volume of his verse is not great, and some of that is scarcely poetry; but his range is still considerable, while the width of his sympathies, the extent of his vision, and the depths of experience which he has sounded, make him one of the great masters of life's secrets. The limitations of Meredith's power and fame run parallel to those of Browning. There are some who would ask no higher praise; but the fact remains that the limitations are real. They are, moreover, of a sort to hamper a poet's power in the present, and they are preëminently fitted to limit his fame in the future.

Mr. Meredith is reported to have said once upon a time that henceforth he would write for himself, since the public of that early day would none of what he had tried to write for it. An even greater poet said in his haste that all men were liars; but he fortunately thought better of it, and continued to use their language in the expression

of truth, for which three or four score generations have proved hungry. It is Meredith's misfortune that he too could not find leisure to repent his haste, and gain the upper hand of his contempt. Contemptuous of men and women in general he certainly is not; and one of the secrets of his power as a novelist is that he sees such possibilities half realized in them. Nor does he doubt man's command of his destiny and ability to make it a high one.

> I take the hap
> Of all my deeds. The wind that fills my sails
> Propels; but I am helmsman.[1]

It is rather the common medium of English speech that he dishonours by a style which at times almost ceases to be language, and becomes a sort of hieroglyphic picture-writing, a huddling together of the salient — and often greatly significant — features of his thought, leaving his vexed reader to supply the gaps as best he may. Let any intelligent person, after his first, or for that matter his fourth, unaided reading of "The Sage Enamoured and the Honest Lady," attempt to put upon paper his idea even of the poem's general drift, and he will understand me. The charge to be brought against it is, that in too many respects it is the lesser counterpart of "Sordello"; a mighty verbal fog-bank, illumined here and there by lightning flashes of memorable meaning. One is tempted at times

[1] *Modern Love*, xx.

to quote Meredith against himself, especially in the love poems: —

> Now seems the language heard of Love as rain
> To make a mire where fruitfulness was meant.[1]

It needs to be straightway added, however, that the fruitfulness does not really fail, and that the mire bears no taint of filthiness; it is simply good soil too curiously tilled. Plainspoken, with a sort of bucolic breadth, Mr. Meredith can be, as, for instance, in the "Teaching of the Nude," or once and again in his "Reading of Earth"; but it is a wholesome and honest plainness, uncorrupted by dubious suggestion.

The greatness of George Meredith's poetry is proclaimed, then, quite as much in spite of as by means of his craftsmanship; which, though often graceful and melodious to a degree, is as often curious and sometimes merely grotesque; but it is proclaimed none the less, and its elements are to be discerned by the most casual reader of his titles. "Modern Love," "Ballads and Poems of Tragic Life," "A Reading of Earth," and "To the Comic Spirit" may serve to suggest these. Taken together and viewed in the light of the sympathy which speaks through his treatment of them, these titles place him among the great literary forces making for sanity in the ethics and religion of to-day. Practically all great poetry

[1] *The Promise in Disturbance.*

deals with religion, and Mr. Meredith appears at once to exemplify this in his use of mythological subjects like the "Appeasement of Demeter," or legends of the saints like the "Song of Theodolinda" branding her bosom with the red-hot nail from the Cross, or the phenomena of modern religious hysteria in "Jump-to-Glory Jane," or so well-worn and orthodox a theme as "A Faith on Trial." But, as generally happens, the real religious significance of his work lies implicit in his treatment of many themes rather than explicit in the titles of a few.

Religion has a keen ear for life's discords, but it is of the essence of the Christian religion to interpret them in terms of possible harmony. Its object is the doing of one Perfect Will on earth and in heaven, and the lifting of man's soul up to a plane where he shall be so adequate to all circumstance as to make even life's contradictions serve him. The introductory sonnet to "Modern Love," already quoted, closes with three ungraceful but significant lines which suggest their author's conception of this truth.

> In labour of the trouble at its fount,
> Leads Life to an intelligible Lord
> The rebel discords up the sacred mount.

These rebel discords play a large part in "Modern Love." It is a story of mutual suspicion between two married, childless, and self-centred lovers, work-

ing to an issue of tragedy. Neither was deliberately unfaithful to the other; but —

> each applied to each that fatal knife,
> Deep questioning, which probes to endless dole.

Mr. Meredith is himself passed-master in the use of this same knife, "deep questioning"; yet with this difference from his brethren who boast of their realism, that they so generally probe to show their skill, or from sheer professional satisfaction in cutting — even to death; while he seems always to have in view the true surgeon's ideal of sounder and more wholesome life. This confusion of good and evil haunts all he does.

> Ah, what a dusty answer gets the soul
> When hot for certainties in this our life![1]

The real suffering and confusion to which man's hearts and plans are put by circumstance make up life's tragedy; the strange fashion by which progress is effected from year to year in nature, and from experience to experience in man, constitutes his "reading of earth"; and the frequent incongruity in all this process, as beauty marches cheek-by-jowl with ugliness, the sublime with the ridiculous, the spiritual with the carnal, suggests life's comedy. Reference has already been made to "Jump-to-Glory Jane." It is a title which no other but Browning would have ventured, and it is doubtful if even he could have compassed Meredith's treatment of it.

[1] *Modern Love*, L.

The seizure of a labourer's widow by a fantastic religious conviction which led her not only to grotesque skips and hops upon her own account, but to the infection of her neighbours with the same jumping habit, would have become, in the hands of most poets, a theme for burlesque treatment and naught else. The opening stanzas remind one of the late Mr. Gilbert's delectable Bishop of Rum-ti-foo in the "Bab Ballads." Necessarily the comedy is broad; but even the careless reader soon becomes aware of an under-running view of seriousness and sympathy. Jane, as has been said, infected her neighbourhood with ecstasy; neither men nor maidens were immune; before the Vicar's door they leaped to extra heights — but no man could accuse them of any theft; they took to a vegetable diet and slept in the fields — but no immorality stained their fervour; they bore their testimony to a shrew, who jumped with the rest — and forebore scolding; until, flying at higher game, Jane jumped before the Bishop, who came upon a visit to the Squire. My Lord was naturally amazed, and his host scandalized. They put her, not unkindly, from the manorial park, and she jumped away, — to die at last by the roadside, in full assurance of her peculiar faith.

> Her end was beautiful: one sigh.
> She jumped a foot when it was nigh.
> A lily in a linen clout
> She looked when they had laid her out.
> It is a lily-light she bears
> For England up the ladder-stairs.

Mr. Le Gallienne is reported to have found a gospel in this final stanza which almost converted him, and is laughed at for his pains by Mr. de Selincourt,[1] who treats the whole thing as pure fun. I venture the assertion that both are wrong. "Jump-to-Glory Jane" is no sermon; but neither is it mere burlesque, nor a piece of Gilbertian nonsense. It is Meredith's characteristic testimony to the Comic Spirit's breadth of sympathy; his recognition of the intimate relation between laughter and tears; of the marvel of life's incongruities; and of the vitality of a religious instinct which persists, not only in spite of, but perhaps by means of, the formality of aproned bishops and the fanaticism of Jumping Janes.

It is a somewhat less confident answer that Mr. Swinburne returns to the three questions just propounded to Mr. Meredith, as to the scope of his work, the clearness of his vision, and the depth of his experience. So far as the amount of his poetry is concerned, there can be no doubt of his claim to a chief place in our choir; but it is to be remembered that "Festus" Bailey — on whom be peace! — was prolific, and that Mr. George Barlow's published works run, and very musically too, to more than fifteen volumes. Few poets in any age have, however, had Mr. Swinburne's excuse for voluminous writing; and it might be reasonably maintained that no English poet has ever shown such complete and natural mastery of lyric metres, and of the language whose

[1] In Mrs. M. S. Henderson's *George Meredith*, p. 220.

wealth they were, in his hands, not only to exhibit but to enhance. This is not to say that his lyric gift is richer or choicer than Shelley's, or that his craftsmanship is equal to Tennyson's; it is simply to give him due credit for the possession of transcendent powers as a Lord of Speech. It would be too much to ask that his song should have the haunting 'spiritual' quality of Shelley's; or that its form should undergo the drastic self-criticism to which Tennyson's was subjected. We are content that he sings, and with such melody and grace as to disarm us when we say that he sings too much. Sure of the fact though the critic may be, he falls into confusion and begins to think criticism a rather poor and unworthy business when asked to say what songs he would wish away. Furthermore, it is to be said in Mr. Swinburne's behalf that he respects the medium in which he works. English is his servant, to be sure; but he exalts it to the place of friend. If he spend its resources somewhat extravagantly at times, that is because he sees as few have ever seen what those resources are. He loves, and doubtless loves too well, to exhibit its charms; but he refrains from compelling it to the playing of mere pranks. Any one who has, in an exhibition of trained beasts, seen the grave might of an elephant, or the splendid grace of a tiger, subdued to the performance of curious and pitiful tricks, has passed his own judgement upon one of the most serious blemishes in the work of Browning and Meredith. Widely to change the fig-

ure, their treatment of their mother tongue at times not only threatens parricide, but parricide by torture.

As a master of poetry's form and music Swinburne's place is, then, not only secure but high. It is when we proceed to test the field of his vision, the width of his sympathy, and his ability to sound the depths of man's experience, that our answers grow less confident and positive. Mr. Arthur Symons has somewhere characterized the poetry of Swinburne's early prime as directed chiefly against God, priests, and kings.

As to the portion of it which seems to be directed against God, all that needs to be said was crowded generations ago into the single sentence, —

He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh.

The divinities that aspiring poets overthrow may be necessary to literature; but they bear very much the same relation to life as do the plaster casts copied by art classes in our schools for young ladies, — they are fragile things, serving art's humbler needs, and not greatly missed when broken in the process.

Against priests and kings, so ardent a republican as Mr. Swinburne makes out a better case. He states it of course with characteristic exaggeration, but there can be no question of his sincerity in entering the lists on behalf of intellectual and political liberty. There is a distinctly religious element in such championship, as he might have learned, had he

chosen, from Mazzini, whom he greatly admired; and I shall presently have occasion to show that the social consciousness of the last half-century is one of the many forms in which religion expresses itself, and, of all the guises assumed by Christianity, the one perhaps most characteristic of the day. Something of man's solidarity and of society's need Swinburne has felt deeply and expressed with power; but the main characteristics of his verse beyond those already mentioned may be said to be pretty frankly pagan. His love of merely sensuous beauty in word and thing, and his content to rest in graceful forms of thought without much inquiry as to the substance behind them, disappoint the reader's mind even while his ears are charmed with the melody. We bear with Meredith's roughness because of our faith in some underlying harmony of thought which shall resolve it. We delight in Swinburne's melody, only in too many cases to experience a feeling of revulsion at a lack, not merely of harmony, but of any real substance to harmonize. Take for instance the two wonderful and characteristic poems, "Aholibah" and "The Masque of Queen Bersabe." The latter is a miracle-play in which, with a delicious simplicity, King David and Nathan quote scraps of Latin, while one of the soldiers swears "by Mahound" and another by the head of St. Paul. Finally the great queens of love who have lived in history and legend, Herodias, Aholibah, Cleopatra, Azubah, and the rest, "all that were fair and foul,"

are summoned by Nathan; they come and each bears testimony to her own beauty, after this manner: —

> "I am the Queen Hesione.
> The seasons that increased in me
> Made my face fairer than all men's.
> I had the summer in my hair;
> And all the pale gold autumn air
> Was as the habit of my sense.
> My body was as fire that shone;
> God's beauty that makes all things one
> Was one among my hand-maidens."

Their testimony and the knowledge of God's judgement on them smites Bathsheba with fear, and leads David, not to repentance, but to a justification of his conduct which is one of the curiosities of literature. As a miracle-masque the whole thing is admirably done; and yet here, as in the kindred poem "Aholibah," and in "Laus Veneris," there is such involution and redundance of the sensuous that one is tempted to judge Mr. Swinburne out of Mr. Meredith's mouth. "I seem to be instructed in one of the mysteries of erotic esotery, yet on my word I am no wiser," cried pompous Dr. Middleton, plagued with his daughter's love-affairs, in "The Egoist." The ponderous phrase recurs as one reads Swinburne's most characteristic work. He is fascinated with the mystery of "erotic esotery," and of all English poets succeeds in enduing it with the most exquisite grace; but it remains a grace of body, — there is little soul.

There are, to be sure, passages like the speech of St. Dorothy, beginning, —

> Christ King, fair Christ, that knowest all men's wit
> And all the feeble fashion of my ways, —

which indicate how great an interpreter of the heart he might have become, had he chosen. With steadfast perversity, however, he has kept the path marked out in his "Hymn to Proserpine:" —

> Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has grown grey from thy breath;
> We have drunken of things Lethean, and fed on the fulness of death.

Again he recurs to the same thought in another poem, "Pilgrims," —

> We have drunken of Lethe at last, we have eaten of Lotus;
> What hurts it us here that sorrows are born and die?
> We have said to the dream that caressed and the dread that smote us,
> Good-night and good-bye.

This is not the stuff whereof great poetry is made, though it lends itself perfectly to the adornment of a kind of hectic beauty. It is a pleasure to contrast with it Mr. Swinburne's wholesome love of the sea and his treatment of its moods; the generous though often exaggerated criticism to be found in his essays; and much that he has said in behalf of liberty; yet the fact remains that his sympathy scarcely reaches to some of the most human of experiences, and he fails to sound the depths of those which it does touch. He recognizes religion and

makes much of the material it offers; but his persistent attempt to pose as a pagan, smacks of something so like affectation as to rob much of his best work of half its power and assurance of immortality.

It is almost with relief, therefore, that we turn from the melodious but not quite natural paganism of Mr. Swinburne, in which despair lies latent, to the utterly sincere pessimism of James Thomson and "The City of Dreadful Night." Thomson was a friend of the late Mr. Bradlaugh. He began life as a regimental schoolmaster, and sustained it by more or less fitful employment in journalism and business. Opium, alcohol, and insomnia played their sorry parts in it, and the end came in University College Hospital in 1882, while Thomson was in his forty-eighth year. "The City of Dreadful Night" was published in 1874, and was so little known, or else so speedily forgotten, that when a few years ago an enterprising publisher attempted, without their author's permission, to reprint some of Mr. Kipling's fugitive newspaper articles relating to Calcutta, he chose this same title, apparently unaware that it had been appropriated; so willing is the world to let that which has a manifest savour of death in it go to its own place, however brilliant its conception and execution may be.

The City of Dreadful Night is the abode of Melancholia, — a city vast and sombre, lying beside a tideless sea, nobly built, well inhabited, but upon which no sun ever rises. Its life, Prometheus-like,

is always renewed, and always eaten out by quenchless sorrow. In the Proem, with its text from Leopardi, the poet tells us why he wrote: —

Why break the seals of mute despair unbidden,
And wail life's discords into careless ears?

Because a cold rage seizes one at whiles
To show the bitter, old, and wrinkled truth
Stripped naked of all vesture that beguiles,
False dreams, false hopes, false masks and modes of youth;
Because it gives some sense of power and passion
In helpless impotence to try to fashion
Our woe in living words, howe'er uncouth.

The traveller enters the City, and passes up and down its streets, following one who seems intent on some sad errand. This proves to be a pilgrimage to the ruined shrines of Faith, Love, and Hope. Here Faith was poisoned, there Love died by violence, and yonder Hope starved. The seeming despair of his guide moves him to question: —

"When Faith and Love and Hope are dead indeed,
Can Life still live? By what doth it proceed?"

As whom his one intense thought overpowers,
He answered coldly, "Take a watch, erase
The signs and figures of the circling hours,
Detach the hands, remove the dial-face;
The works proceed until run down; although
Bereft of purpose, void of use, still go."

He circled thus forever tracing out
The series of the fraction left of life;
Perpetual recurrence in the scope
Of but three terms, dead Faith, dead Love, dead Hope.

This last reference is, of course, to the fantastic mathematical formula of pessimism, obtained by dividing threescore and ten by the persistently recurring Three: that is by 33.3, representing the years of a generation, or by 333, representing, as in the poem, dead Faith, Hope, and Love; the quotient in either case resulting in an infinite series of the figures 2, 1, 0.

The City lays its charm upon its visitor: —

> Poor wretch! who once hath paced that dolent city
> Shall pace it often doomed beyond all pity,
> With horror ever deepening from the first.

All this, however, is but the outward seeming of the City's life. The visitor soon becomes aware of a throng in the streets pressing toward what appears to be a cathedral; and there he hears its philosophy expounded. The great church is a splendid habitation of gloom, wherein a vast multitude hang wistfully upon an earnest preacher's lips, if haply he will show them any good. This is his introduction: —

> "O melancholy Brothers, dark, dark, dark.
> O battling in black floods without an ark!
> O spectral wanderers of unholy Night!
> My soul hath bled for you these sunless years,
> With bitter blood-drops running down like tears;
> O dark, dark, dark, withdrawn from joy and light."

Then follows the doctrine: —

> "And now at last authentic word I bring,
> Witnessed by every dead and living thing;
> Good tidings of great joy for you, for all:

There is no God; no fiend with names divine
Made us and tortures us; if we must pine,
It is to satiate no Being's gall.

"I find no hint throughout the universe
Of good or ill, of blessing or of curse;
I find alone Necessity supreme;
With infinite mystery, abysmal, dark,
Unlighted ever by the faintest spark,
For us the flitting shadows of a dream."

And here is his application:—

"O Brothers of sad lives! they are so brief;
A few short years must bring us all relief;
Can we not bear these years of labouring breath?
But if you would not this poor life fulfill,
Lo, you are free to end it when you will,
Without the fear of waking after death."

Here a lamentable voice was raised from among the congregation in confirmation of the preacher's message, although between the words of every sentence of it there sounded the inappeasable human desire for comfort. It closes thus:—

"Speak not of comfort where no comfort is,
Speak not at all: can words make foul things fair?
Our life 's a cheat, our death a black abyss:
Hush and be mute, envisaging despair."

And this the preacher in his turn reaffirms:—

"My Brothers, my poor Brothers, it is thus:
This life holds nothing good for us,
But it ends soon and nevermore can be;
And we knew nothing of it ere our birth
And shall know nothing when consigned to earth;
I ponder these thoughts and they comfort me."

This is the philosophy of the City of Dreadful Night, and the poem leaves us without the city gates, beside the giant statue of its genius, Melancholia.

> The moving sun and stars from east to west
> Circle before her in the sea of air;
> Shadows and gleams glide round her solemn rest.
> Her subjects often gaze upon her there:
> The strong to drink new strength of iron endurance,
> The weak new terrors; all, renewed assurance
> And confirmation of the old despair.

It is needless to point out the literary value to this true poet of his religious theme; but it seems worth while to set in contrast with it the words of another poet picturing a widely different city.

"And I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

Before leaving Thomson, it is worth while to notice the resultant attitude of his philosophy toward Nature. One passage in the poem called "Vane's Story" will illustrate my meaning, al-

though due allowance must be made for its jocose bitterness. Vane speaks: —

> "For I am infinitely tired
> With this old sphere we once admired,
> With this old earth we loved too well,
> And would not mind a change of Hell.
> The same old stolid hills and leas,
> The same old stupid, patient trees,
> The same old ocean, blue and green,
> The same sky, cloudy or serene;
> The old two-dozen hours to run
> Between the settings of the sun,
> The same three hundred sixty-five
> Dull days to every year alive;
> Old stingy measure, weight, and rule,
> No margin left to play the fool;
> The same old way of getting born
> Into it, naked and forlorn;
> The same old way of creeping out
> Through death's low door, for lean and stout."

I have felt justified in giving this important place to Thomson, because scarce any one else has so eloquently expressed the philosophical conclusion of a pure Necessitarianism, when once its influences have oozed down into the stratum of life's commonplace.

An interesting variant of the same general type is to be found in John Davidson's "Ballad in Blank Verse," which portrays the experience of a rather sensual young Scotsman whose parents are deeply concerned for his spiritual welfare, and who plead with him. His father speaks: —

"My son, reject not Christ; he pleads through me;
The Holy Spirit uses my poor words.
How would it fill your mother's heart and mine
And God's great heart with joy unspeakable,
Were you, a helpless sinner, now to cry,
'Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief.'"

But the boy, whose blood —

fulfilled
Of brine, of sunset, and his dreams, exhaled
A vision,

would not hear. He broke his mother's heart, and then, to please his father and if possible to atone for the past, professed conversion and came to the Lord's Table with him. We cannot follow the tragedy in detail. He finds —

like husks of corn
The bread, like vitriol the sip of wine!
I eat and drink damnation to myself
To give my father's troubled spirit peace.

Of course he ends by renouncing all that he has confessed, shouting forth in one breath his determination to have no creed, and in the next his acceptance of a creed compact of pantheism and positivism, and concludes with the determination to be a poet, finding comfort and inspiration in Nature.

"No creed for me! I am a man apart:
A mouthpiece for the creeds of all the world.
A soulless life that angels may possess
Or demons haunt, wherein the foulest things
May loll at ease beside the loveliest;
A martyr for all mundane moods to tear;
The slave of every passion."

This "Ballad in Blank Verse" is less logically complete than the "City of Dreadful Night." It states the premisses, but forbears to draw Thomson's bitter conclusion. One feels in reading it, however, that hopelessness waits at the end of the story, even though the concluding chapters be yet unwritten.

It was to be expected that the social problem in its varied ramifications would prove a fruitful theme for the more serious of the minor poets. Crabbe and Goldsmith gave the eighteenth century some little foretaste of it; Hood grew sentimental over it; Kingsley shocked his comfortable age into at least thinking of it between whiles: but about all these there was a suggestion of the reformer. There was something of the teacher, not to say of the preacher, in their manner. It remained for the poets of the present generation to state the bald factors of the question with a bitterness of realism that sometimes scoffs at the problem as a whole, and treats the reflection of its painful elements as an end of art in itself. Not from the tragedy of life as a soul-stirring thing, but rather from its dulness, pallor, sorrow, and bitter monotony, have some of the truest artists drawn their inspiration. Take, for instance, John Davidson's "A Northern Suburb:" —

> Roused by the fee'd policeman's knock,
> And sad that day should come again,
> Under the stars the workmen flock
> In haste to reach the morning train.

For here dwell those who must fulfil
Dull tasks in uncongenial spheres,
Who toil through dread of coming ill,
And not with hope of happier years.

The lowly folk who scarcely dare
Conceive themselves perhaps misplaced,
Whose prize for unremitting care
Is only not to be disgraced.

The same theme is dealt with by A. Mary F. Robinson, Madame Darmesteter, in her "New Arcadia," but with a distinct recognition of its ethical side.

Others shall learn and shudder and sorrow and know
What shame is in the world they will not see.
They cover it up with leaves, they make a show
Of Maypole garlands over, but there shall be
A wind to scatter their gauds, and a wind to blow
And purify the hidden, dreaded thing
Festering underneath; and so I sing.

Yet she is far from disregarding the extremely complicated nature of the problem, as is shown in the "Scapegoat," where she tells the story of a beautiful child who grew up in wretched surroundings to develop a miserable life.

Yet now when I watch her pass with a heavy reel,
Shouting her villanous song,
Is it only pity or shame, do you think, that I feel
For the infinite sorrow and wrong?

With a sick, strange wonder I ask, Who shall answer the sin,
Thou, lover, brothers of thine?
Or he who left standing the hovel to perish in?
Or I; who gave no sign?

All things considered, however, I am inclined to think that John Davidson has given at once the grimmest and most searching statement of one phase of the ever-present question in his poem entitled "Thirty Bob a Week," in which a London clerk opens his heart concerning his struggle to live upon a weekly wage of thirty shillings, and expounds something of the philosophy to which that struggle has led him. The Clerk says: —

"I face the music, sir; you bet I ain't a cur;
Strike me lucky if I don't believe I 'm lost!

"For like a mole I journey in the dark,
A-travelling along the underground
From my Pillar'd Halls and broad Suburbean Park,
To come the daily, dull, official round;
And home again at night, with my pipe all alight,
A-scheming how to count ten bob a pound.

"And it 's often very cold and very wet,
And my misses stitches towels for a hunks;
And the Pillar'd Hall is half of it to let —
Three rooms about the size of travelling trunks.
And we cough, my wife and I, to dislocate a sigh,
When the noisy little kids are in their bunks."

Then he goes on to say: —

"So p'r'aps we are in Hell, for all that I can tell,
And lost and damn'd and served up hot to God.

"I ain't blaspheming, Mr. Silver-tongue;
I 'm saying things a bit beyond your art:
Of all the rummy starts you ever sprung,
Thirty bob a week 's the rummiest start!
With your science and your books,
And your theories about spooks,
Did you ever think of looking in your heart?

"I did n't mean your pocket, Mr., no;
I mean that having children and a wife,
With thirty bob on which to come and go,
Is n't dancing to the tabor and the fife:
When it does n't make you drink,
By Heaven! it makes you think,
And notice curious items about life.

. . . . . .

"It 's a naked child against a hungry wolf;
It 's playing bowls upon a splitting wreck;
It 's walking on a string across a gulf
With mill-stones fore-and-aft about your neck;
But the thing is daily done by many and many a one,
And we fall, face forward, fighting, on the deck."

It is doubtful if the bitter monotonies of life, its grim realities of poverty, anxiety, and suffering, its sordid necessities even, ever before found so large place in the material which is wrought over by the highest art into poetry. The age seems to have awakened to a new sense of the influence of environment upon philosophy, and there is a note of insistence in the "Why" which the world of toiling poor is always uttering, that meets quick response from the poet.

The question is worth raising, whether this constant contemplation of life's sordidness may not account in some degree for the growing love of the cynical and the grim which has been so manifest during the last score of years. Poetry has gone out of its way to collect and interpret the nightmares of folk-lore and folk-song. A typical instance of this endeavour is to be found in Alma Strettel

and Carmen Sylva's "Bard of the Dimbo-Vitza." It is an anthology of Roumanian folk-songs, of which the little poem called "The Comforters" is as typical and familiar as any.

My father is dead and his cap is mine,
His cap of fur and his leathern belt —
Mine, too, his knives.
When I fall asleep, when I slumbering lie,
Then the knives spring forth, from their sheaths they fly
And roam the fields.
I know not whither the knives have strayed,
But when morning dawns, at my window-pane
I hear a tapping — I fling it wide,
And there are my knives come home again.
"Where have ye been?" I ask them then,
And they make reply: "In the hearts of men!
There was one so sick for love and torn —
We healed its wound;
And another was weary and travel-worn —
We gave it rest.
For dear to us are the hearts of men,
And dear their blood;
We drink it as furrows drink the rain,
Then tapping come to thy window-pane:
Make way for thy knives, they have done their work;
Now wipe the blood with thy sleeve away —
Thy sleeve with the dusk-red, broidered flowers —
And wash the sleeve in the river clean,
Then thrust us once more our sheaths between,
The sheaths on the leathern belt!"

The defiant attitude toward Fate was characteristic of the late W. E. Henley. Sometimes this is nobly put, as in his famous verses "To R. T. H. B."

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

But he contradicts himself in such lines as those quoted at the close of last chapter:—

Let us be drunk, and for a while forget,
Forget, and ceasing even from regret,
Live without reason and in spite of rhyme.

This note of defiance, however, rarely persists in poetry, since it is essentially inharmonious; and even in the poetry of unbelief it tends to fade into plaintiveness.

Mr. William Vaughn Moody, in his "Fire-Bringer," describes the singing of Pandora to the yet soulless creatures that sprang from the stones and clods thrown by Deukalion and Pyrrha to repeople the earth after the flood. It was —

a doubtful song,
Its meaning faint or none, but mingled up
Of all that nests and housekeeps in the heart,
Or puts out in lone passion toward the vast
And cannot choose but go.

There was a beauty in its very wistfulness; and there is a similar mingling of sweetness and shadow in much of the most melodious recent English verse.

Hear Mr. Rolleston of the Rhymers' Club, for instance, sighing for Nirvana.

For others, Lord, Thy purging fires,
The loves reknit, the crown, the palm.
For me the death of all desires
In deep, eternal calm.

Mr. G. A. Greene is less easily reconciled.

They have taken away my Lord;
They have shattered the one great Hope,
They have left us alone to cope
With our terrible selves: . . .
. . . . . .
The strength of immortal love;
The Comfort of millions that weep;
Prayer and the Cross we adored —
All is lost! There is no one above;
We are left like the beasts that creep —
They have taken away my Lord.

Mr. Austin Dobson, who generally eschews theology in his graceful verses, has however furnished an admirable illustration of this same restiveness under a scheme of things which starves the soul or denies its rights, in his "Prayer of the Swine to Circe." These are, of course, the companions of Ulysses changed by magic into swinish shape and condemned to live as swine; but with men's hearts still beating in them, and mocked at every turn by human longing and aspiration.

"If swine we be — if we indeed be swine,
Daughter of Persé, make us swine indeed,
Well-pleased on litter-straw to lie supine,
Well-pleased on mast and acorn-shales to feed,
Stirred by all instincts of the bestial breed;
But O Unmerciful! O Pitiless!
Leave us not thus with sick men's hearts to bleed,
To waste long days in yearning, dumb distress
And memory of things gone, and utter hopelessness."

The illustrations of literature's debt to faith,

both in its victories and its defeats, throng upon the memory in such multitudes as almost to compel too lavish quotation. Impatience with the accepted estimate of Old Testament characters and their deeds seems to have inspired a very notable poem in Lord de Tabley's "Jaël"; Mr. W. S. Blunt's group of sonnets upon his own imprisonment begins daringly enough, —

> "From Caiaphas to Pilate was I sent";

a selection from the poems of the late J. A. Symonds is introduced by his lines upon "The Temptation in the Wilderness"; and it is doubtful if Robert Buchanan ever did more memorable work than is to be found in his "Ballad of Judas Iscariot." The problem which Death propounds to Life also haunts poetry to-day as persistently as ever; and the three quotations which follow suggest three diverse approaches to it. The first is the stanza already quoted from Mrs. Meynell's "To the Beloved Dead": —

> Beloved, thou art like a tune that idle fingers
> Play on a window-pane.
> The time is there, the form of music lingers;
> But O, thou sweetest strain,
> Where is thy soul? Thou liest i' the wind and rain.

Here the sorrow verges on despair. In Mr. C. G. D. Roberts' "Falling Leaves" the wistfulness remains, but it has grown more restful, as though touched at least with the finger-tip of Faith.

Lightly He blows, and at His breath they fall,
The perishing kindreds of the leaves; they drift,
Spent flames of scarlet, gold aerial,
Across the hollow year, noiseless and swift.
Lightly He blows, and countless as the falling
Of snow by night upon a solemn sea,
The ages circle down beyond recalling,
To strew the hollows of Eternity.
He sees them drifting through the spaces dim,
And leaves and ages are as one to Him.[1]

Francis Thompson treats the same experience; but he has advanced to the point where faith enables him to grapple with it upon equal terms, and even with a sort of whimsical playfulness.

Life is a coquetry
Of Death, which wearies me,
Too sure
Of the amour.

A tiring-room where I
Death's divers garments try
Till fit
Some fashion sit.

It seemeth me too much
I do rehearse for such
A mean
And single scene.

The climax might be capped by a verse or two of Mr. Kipling's poem, "To Wolcott Balestier," surely the most rollicking of threnodies, but yet significant of a certain vigour which faith lends to

[1] Archer, *Poets of the Younger Generation*, p. 365.

poetry, and which, though doubtless in more chastened form, is necessary to poetry's higher development. So long as faith is lacking, even the well-endowed poet will not only tend to write his music in a minor key, but be forced to content himself with a place in the second or third rank of the world's singers.

On the other hand, the note of faith, even when awkwardly or rudely struck, always finds its echo in men's hearts. Walt Whitman can scarce be credited with a particularly exalted mind; while his taste, if it existed at all, can often be represented only by a negative quantity, his own phrase, "barbaric yawp," pretty exactly characterizing the greater part of his poetry; yet there was in the man himself, and there still speaks through his writings, a certain robustious 'acceptance of the Universe,' which has given him place and fame among the inspirers of men. There was a time when great things were expected of Mr. William Watson, and very admirable things have been done to fulfil the expectation; but yet on the mass of his work there rests a sort of blight, which, while sometimes enhancing its beauty, condemns it to relative ineffectiveness, because man's natural taste is bound finally to refuse the negative and fretful. Mr. Stephen Phillips has inspired like expectations and achieved memorable successes. A master of phrase, who may sometimes be suspected of making phrases for sheer love of the trade, he has seemed to yield

to the fashion of his day in "Christ in Hades," a very notable sketch rather than a great poem;[1] on the other hand, for delicacy, sweetness, and power to reveal all that is deepest and highest in the human heart, his "Marpessa" will, it seems to me, bear to be set beside any English poem of the last fifty years, without fear of the comparison. His later dramatic work has been too extravagantly praised to make any fair estimate of it quite practicable. Suffice it to say that no recent poet has attempted dramatic tragedy with a better literary equipment or more reasonable hope of fame.

Meanwhile, amid the thousand musical voices that have been raised upon both sides of the Atlantic to sing of life and love and death, it is interesting to note how often a poet is distinguished by some haunting word upon religion. The late Francis Thompson could never have been a popular writer, so fanciful, involved, and even grotesque was much of his work. Yet his "Hound of Heaven" has not only become widely known, but has been chosen for special and elaborate publication in America as his most characteristic utterance. It begins: —

> I fled Him down the nights and down the days;
> I fled Him down the arches of the years;
> I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways
> Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears
> I hid from Him, and under running laughter.

[1] Compare the criticism of Mr. William Archer, in *Poets of the Younger Generation*, pp. 328–329.

Up vistaed hopes I sped;
And shot precipitated
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,
From those strong feet that followed, followed after.
But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat — and a Voice beat
More instant than the Feet —
"All things betray thee, who betrayest Me."

Probably more people know Mr. R. W. Gilder by his two quatrains, beginning —

If Jesus Christ is a man,

than by anything else that he has written. The quaint dogmatism of the late T. E. Brown's "My Garden" is likely to be remembered far longer than that gifted Manxman's inspiring "Letters."

A garden is a lovesome thing, God wot!
Rose plot,
Fringed pool,
Ferned grot —
The veriest school
Of peace; and yet the fool
Contends that God is not —
Not God! in gardens when the eve is cool?
Nay, but I have a sign;
'T is very sure God walks in mine.

This same assurance of the essential soundness of the Universe, its possession by a rational Spirit, and man's capacity to dominate it in the interests of his completer life, goes far to account for the appeal which Robert Louis Stevenson and Mr. Kipling have

made to the present generation. Stevenson, though the master of prose, was but an indifferent poet; he had his share of contact with the world's rough hand, to say nothing of his long struggle to make an ailing body do a full day's work. Yet it would be hard to surpass the buoyancy and zest with which he met experience, or to overemphasize his assurance that faith was needful to life. His confession of this faith is famous: —

> For still the Lord is Lord of might;
> In deeds, in deeds, He takes delight;
> The plough, the spear, the laden barks,
> The field, the founded city marks;
> He marks the smiler of the streets,
> The singer upon garden seats;
> He sees the climber in the rocks;
> To Him the shepherd folds his flocks.
> For those He loves that underprop
> With daily virtues Heaven's top,
> And bear the falling sky with ease,
> Unfrowning caryatides.

Mr. Kipling's McAndrew singing to his engine's music of —

> "Law, Order, Duty an' Restraint, Obedience, Discipline!"

joins in the same chorus; and even the common soldier with his inappeaseable hunger —

> For to admire and for to see,

bears witness to man's power to rule circumstance, if he have faith enough.

The conclusion of the whole matter has been

luminously stated by Mr. A. H. Crauford in his "Enigmas of the Spiritual Life."

"Poetry is as music come to itself, rallying from its divine trance, and vainly endeavouring to portray those sacred and awful things which it is not lawful for a man to utter. The very root or spring of poetry is an abiding discontent with the actual and a quenchless longing for the Ideal. . . . Revolt against what is thought to be religion may inspire a great poem, as it inspired Lucretius and Shelley; but acquiescence in the vanishing of religion is fatally depressing to poets. Gods are needed if only to be defied. The Sublime may live in apparent antagonism to the Infinite; but it cannot live in the absence of the Infinite. Poetry must invent a God if none really exists."

And so must Life.

CHAPTER XV

THE NEWER FICTION. I

At a recent meeting of the American Historical Association, the learned President, Professor G. B. Adams of Yale, chose as the theme of his annual address, "History and the Philosophy of History." The speaker belongs to a school of investigators many of whom have gone so far in their suspicion of generalization, their contempt of style, and their worship of bare 'facts,' as to hasten a reaction that was bound to come. Let me not however seem to bring a railing accusation against Professor Adams himself. The significant thing about the address was his recognition of the impending change, and the welcome, albeit a lugubrious welcome, which he extended to it. With real generosity, though it was the generosity of a much-enduring and chastened spirit, he admitted the gnawing hunger of men for the meaning of things. Caspar at his cottage door reiterating the fact of Marlborough's triumph can no longer quite ignore little Peterkin, with his insistent "What good came of it at last?" Nay, he must even be civil on occasion to Wilhelmine's dogmatic, "Why, 't was a very wicked thing!" Neither Peterkin nor Wilhelmine is, if I interpret this address aright, *persona grata*

to Professor Adams and his fellows; but the time is coming when they must be not merely endured but recognized. History must take account of them, perhaps be delivered for a time into the hands of those who share their possession by the demons of philosophy; as St. Paul delivered Hymenæus and Alexander unto Satan — until they should learn not to blaspheme.

I would not speak lightly of the labours of the historical investigator. His research is of course a prime factor in the great and too little esteemed branch of learning to which he devotes himself. But the fact remains that it is a part of the historian's duty to interpret as well as to depict; and, if he insist upon remaining a mere annalist or editor, he will have no reason to complain when the mass of intelligent men desert him for the sociologist and political economist. Every intellectual calling tends to develop the scribe, and to degenerate under his hand into a sort of game which none but the initiated can play. The field of Biblical criticism offers perhaps the most notable illustration of this tendency to-day; but every path of technical learning is likely to lead us into a similar desert of professionalism, where we shall cease to be the masters of ideas and become mere servants of convention. The danger which lurks in "settling Hoti's business" is that there shall seem to be no worthy business but Hoti's in the world.[1]

[1] In general, explanatory notes are fatal to the force of literary

All art faces this peril, which comes with the formation of a 'school'; and the art of story-telling is no exception to the rule. A great artist may found a school; he can rarely be shut up to the terms and rules of one. We have seen in earlier chapters how persistently the Masters of Fiction transcend the limits of the professional labels wherewith critics would tag them. The quality of genius does not adapt it to residence in pigeon-holes, and satisfactorily to define a man generally means his assignment to the third or fourth rank. To call Scott a romanticist, as though he were nothing more, is to focus attention upon the mere framework of his novels; and to speak of Thackeray as a realist — at least in the technical sense of that hard-used term — is to penetrate little deeper than the surface of his work. One cannot think of Dickens as sitting down deliberately to construct a novel in accordance with certain approved rules of the art; and when George Eliot is caught mapping out an elaborate fiction-scheme and working up 'local colour,' she shows her lesser rather than her greater side. 'Local colour,' indeed, when sought for itself, generally proves to be a poor thing enough. What goes by that name in "Adam Bede" is really almost as universal as the sunlight; and in so far as its tints are governed by the neighbourhood in which the scene is laid, the

allusions and impertinent to the reader as well; but Browning is an exception to all rules, and so if any reader has difficulty here, let him turn to *The Grammarian's Funeral.*

realism is not a thing the author sought, but a natural part of her experience; she was not so much possessed of it as by it. Later on she began in the more modern manner to make journeys, to consult lawyers, and to institute research, in order that her pictures of life might gain an exacter verity; with the result that something of her vital quality departed; and had a few more years been granted her, she would have seen, and deserved to see, among the monstrosities of book-making, a "Romola" illustrated with half-tone photographs of Florence.

The camera, with its so-called 'truth to nature,' is a tool of great convenience; but it has infected some little men with madness. In fact, the camera may prove as untruthful as an epitaph. Any one who will take the trouble to reverse his photographic film in the process of printing may reproduce the features of a horseman, for instance, with perfect distinctness and verisimilitude; yet the rider will be guiding his horse with the right instead of the left hand; his girths will be secured upon the wrong side; every detail of his equipment is liable to like whimsical reversal; and should he be caught in the act of mounting, it will be by aid of the 'off' stirrup, like Mr. Winkle in the immortal Pickwick episode. The initiated will possibly discover the trick as such a picture is examined; but to the ignorant nothing will seem wrong; he may recognize both man and horse, and exclaim upon the excellence of the likeness; he might conceivably

form his own horsemanship upon this model and wonder why he is a laughing-stock, until told that while each 'fact' and 'feature' of reality is correctly depicted in the photograph, the relations are so topsy-turvy as to make the whole thing a peculiarly dangerous, because a remarkably consistent, lie.

I am not contending that ability to paint exactly the less conspicuous and dignified facts of life is of little moment to the writer of fiction. By all means let the presentment of the parish pump be lifelike; but let it be remembered at the same time that too great dependence upon parish pumps sets parochial limits to the work in which they figure. There is a something —

> far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean, and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
> A motion and a spirit.

I would not dogmatize here. If any reader prefer to say that there only seems to be something, I am content for the moment to have it so; simply remarking that the *seeming* is one of the vital facts of life and a fact of utmost moment to the production of great imaginative literature. It is hard to believe that either "A Winter's Tale" or "As You Like It" could have gained much had the seacoast of Bohemia been charted or an ordnance map of the Forest of Arden lain at Shakespeare's hand.

Writers of fiction are bound to take account of Religion; partly upon general principles, because of the place which religious views and institutions hold in the life of all ages and races; and partly because each new generation has its own religious experiences and problems, which often seem of transcendent importance to its day. Chaucer's Pilgrims, for instance, illustrate the instinctive recourse of early literature to institutional religion for the natural setting or frame of a work of the imagination. The Pilgrimage is itself formally religious; a large number of the Pilgrims are more or less closely — and unworthily — identified with the service of the Church; the characters who figure in the Tales are often Churchmen; and few scraps of Chaucer's verse are better or more deservedly remembered than that which portrays the godly parish priest.

Butler's "Hudibras," on the other hand, illustrates what the religious controversies of some particular generation may do for a clever author who is as far as possible from planning a religious work; just as "The Pilgrim's Progress" has enshrined in imperishable form the older Puritan theology as well as the deep perennial experiences of man's heart. The distinction between the two is one which has application to the literature of our own day. "Hudibras" remains the greatest burlesque in English — a marvel of cleverness; yet to the general reader it is likely to be known only by shreds and patches; which in turn may be said to live by their wits. The

11625

same fate must have overtaken "The Pilgrim's Progress" had it been designed primarily to maintain or to oppose some current theological scheme; but because Bunyan told the story of his own religious experience and developed its universal qualities, his allegory lives with a vitality so abundant as to galvanize its very raiment and baggage into at least the semblance of life. Butler depicts, though controversially and in terms of burlesque, the habit of a day; Bunyan interprets the experience of the race.

In attempting to apply these principles to a study of recent fiction, one is almost overwhelmed in the first place by its mass, and considerably hampered in the second by the effort of a certain school of writers to resolve the telling of tales into a thing of rules and conventions. The latter tries the critic's temper; the former daunts him, not merely by the amount of reading needful for adequate acquaintance with the field which he is traversing, but by the fact that so much time must be given to books which, like the prophet's gourd, spring up with vast luxuriance in a night to wither in a day. Some of these are veriest trash and give point to Lamb's saying that when a new book appeared he liked to read an old one. Others, by their genuineness, insight, careful construction, and excellent style, claim every right to live, but cannot, simply because their numbers are so great, and the flowing tide of successors so overwhelming. These volumes, though abundantly

able to maintain themselves in a fair field, often seem, like the cavalry in Victor Hugo's legend of Waterloo, to be ridden down by those behind them before they ever find it. Since, therefore, many worthy names must be passed by with a bare mention, while others are omitted altogether, I shall try to do little more than indicate certain classes into which the novels of the last thirty years naturally fall with reference to their use of the themes or the spirit of religion.

The first of these is the distinctively 'religious' novel,—a work of fiction, that is, whose purpose is either to plead a religious or theological cause, or else to purvey amusement so seasoned with piety as to adapt it to religious times and tastes. The institution known as the Sunday School Library has in America caused a large demand for this type of writing, which busy pens have been quick to supply. That the product should be of mediocre quality or worse was to have been expected. Yet here, as so often happens, it is probable that the 'clamour of the time' has been upon the whole unjust in its criticism. A 'Sunday-School book' has commonly stood in newspaper parlance and in the talk of the street for a story in which the good are preternaturally good and the bad without redeeming traits. If the former die, it is upon a public death-bed and in the most pungent odour of sanctity; while the way of the wicked is turned upside down. No doubt the appointed Sunday reading of an elder day gave

some justification to the mockers. It was apt to be either priggish and stilted, or else substantial and dull. Of late years such efforts have been made to avoid the mawkish and unnatural that these defects have been in a considerable degree overcome. These libraries have found larger space upon their shelves for biography of a popular sort, for entertaining and well-illustrated 'nature-books,' for volumes of travel and stories of adventure; still the chief demand is for fiction; and some fiction produced to meet it has had enormous vogue.

An American author, E. P. Roe, wrote and sold by the tens of thousands books like "Barriers Burned Away," in which true love and true piety, after passing through fire and flood, — the fire being the conflagration which in 1871 destroyed Chicago, — triumphed gloriously together. It was far enough from being literature, and yet much human nature with some genuine humour and pathos found expression. The worst that can be said of it is that it was somewhat lush and sentimental. J. G. Holland, a journalist and magazine editor of distinction in his day, is another writer whose later fiction must be included here, though it is characterized by much firmer fibre and a far truer literary sense. A book like "Arthur Bonnicastle" could scarcely have been written, or must have missed a large part of its multitude of readers, but for the moral and religious purpose which speaks so honestly through it. Critics of literature do not stop to discuss the

numerous volumes of "A. L. O. E." The author of "The Schönberg-Cotta Family" finds scant grace at the hands of cyclopedia-makers; Mrs. Ewing is dismissed with a paragraph; Miss Charlotte Yonge and Mrs. Craik with a column. Though the two last-named belong to an elder generation, the quality of their work has given it not only wide popularity, but such distinction as primacy in the class which we are discussing can confer. "John Halifax, Gentleman" and "A Noble Life" are no doubt a little surcharged with sentiment; yet the large place which they and their compeers have held in the 'Sunday reading' of the last thirty years affords matter for congratulation to lovers of literature as well as to guardians of morals. The late Dean Farrar's "Eric," and other stories of school-life, are better than those fancy who know them only as the objects of Mr. Kipling's contempt; but their lack of the quality which has made "Tom Brown" a classic is evident enough.

More recently there has arisen a type midway between the distinctively religious novel and the story of adventure or of manners, which may serve to connect this class with that which follows it. Mr. C. W. Gordon's "Sky Pilot," and some of Mr. Norman Duncan's stories, in their successful appeal to readers, make almost equal use of the conditions of frontier-life and the experiences of missionary preachers or medical men. The instant acceptance of Mr. J. M. Barrie's "Auld Licht Idylls" and the

late John Watson's "Beside the Bonnie Brier-Bush" was due to something more than a clever literary device. A story of humble life, told with genuine skill and out of first-hand knowledge, will always find readers; charge such a tale with sentiment which upon the whole is true and sane, spice it with humour, sweeten and light the whole with the faith of wayfaring men who seek a celestial city, and it at once develops the elements of the widest if not the most permanent popularity.

The second of the classes above referred to comprises some eminent names and books, which must, however, be rather summarily dismissed, because they do not fall immediately within the field of our view. It includes the novels of contemporary manners into which religion enters as an incident — sometimes merely as an accident — of life. How much Mr. W. D. Howells and Mr. Henry James owe to the mystical Swedenborgian doctrines of their fathers I have no means of estimating. Both have been prolific writers, and each has exerted a considerable influence upon literary faith and practice. Both know New England at first hand and have done much to interpret it to the world; but neither has had the intimate and deep experience of its religious life needful for an entirely true picture. The outer framework of meeting-house, parsonage, Sunday school, prayer-meeting, and all the rest, has been treated by too many writers as if it were the only index of Puritan religious life that they needed to

consult. Miss Mary E. Wilkins (Mrs. Freeman) saw with clearer vision, but has chosen to occupy herself too exclusively with the development of its sombre and often tragic elements. Others with less literary skill have made cheap sport of it. In the realm of the short story it has remained for Miss Sarah Orne Jewett to interpret it with an understanding heart. To her its finer features have been revealed, and her charming tales of a people to whom she belonged by sympathy as well as blood, are unmarred so far as I remember by any blemish of caricature or condescension. It is not necessary to the New Englander of Puritan type that the world think well of him, though he does not despise its esteem; he can bear, because he is used to bearing, misunderstanding and caricature, even the condescension of 'literary people' sometimes having its amusing side; the thing which he cannot bear is self-revelation of the depths in his thought and experience to those who would misunderstand, or, worse still, tell cheap tales of sacred things which they had partly seen. The writer who will do justice to the religious life of New England, especially to its depths of tenderness, its intense idealism, its capacity not so much for ascetic as for hidden sacrifice, and perhaps most of all to its unfailing humour, — a humour essentially related to its faith, — and who will do this in a work of sustained power, will go far toward producing 'the great American novel.'

The late Edward Eggleston, who before his death had become known as a historian rather than as a novelist, is quite as likely to be remembered by the sketches of life in the Middle West to which itinerant preaching introduced his youth, as by the painstaking research of his maturity. "The Circuit Rider" and "The Hoosier Schoolmaster" have an historical value quite as real as "The Beginnings of a Nation." Bret Harte has done a similar service to the Pacific slope and the days of the Argonauts; and in the doing it has shown talents of so unusual a quality as probably to win a secure place for his work. Not only does an indefinable distinction attach to his manner, but a very genuine humanity appears in his matter. He would doubtless have resented the accusation of preaching in his novels; yet, apart from his deliciously farcical verse, and his parodies, to the making of which he brought almost unique gifts, the bulk of his most significant prose is one long and ingenious endeavour to show the image of God, as it persisted, sometimes altogether hidden, more often badly defaced and obscured, in the souls of rude, profane, and even criminal men. Mrs. Margaret Deland has not only contributed a portrait to the gallery of modern theological martyrs, — a rather sickly crew upon the whole, — in her "John Ward, Preacher," but has put the reading public in her permanent debt by acquainting them with the Reverend Dr. Lavender of Chester. Mrs. Edith Wharton, who has chosen

to depict Vanity Fair in various modern guises, has also chosen to go to Scripture for her titles, as "The House of Mirth" and "The Fruit of the Tree" bear witness. Mr. Archibald Marshall, in "Exton Manor," has followed Trollope, though with no lack of originality, in a latter-day story of clerical life and parochial tragi-comedy. Maxwell Gray will be longest and best remembered by her very charming picture of life in a country parsonage, and her not very convincing Dean Maitland. Du Maurier's "Peter Ibbetson" is not to be understood except as drawn against the background of Pentonville with its respectability and its Sabbatarianism; though the reader all the time suspects his author of doing less justice to Pentonville than Thackeray in "Vanity Fair" did to Clapham.

A significant note of revolt is sounded in work like Lucas Malet's "Sir Richard Calmady," which, while purporting to be a novel of the day rather than a *Tendenzschrift*, still shows unmistakably the author's impatience with commonly accepted standards of belief and morals, — the most notable feature of the book being, not any particular doctrine of faith or unbelief explicitly stated in it, but the grotesque deformity which haunts the whole story. Now a physical misfortune may exert the same ennobling influence upon a work of fiction that it does in real life, calling out that ability to conquer hostile circumstance which is man's highest quality. Sir Richard shows in the

physical sphere something of this power; but the author never lets its spirit blow through her book as a whole. That remains unwholesome and sallow; its appeal, in spite of the writer's probable intention, being of the *macabre* order, striking the imagination and gripping the attention like a dance of death. On the other hand Mr. William De Morgan, in a group of novels which have recently delighted many readers, brings a catholic taste and an admirable digestion to life's table. He finds it spread with a strange assortment of sweet and bitter; with some things indeed that have generally been counted poisonous beyond the power of antidote; yet 'agnostic' though one suspects Mr. De Morgan himself to be, he still has faith in life and love and truth, which comes so near to having faith in God, that in a literary sense at least he is saved by it, as his abounding humour, which is one of the sure notes of literary salvation, witnesses.

It was to be expected that the rising tide of romanticism in the early part of last century should finally make itself felt in the realm of religion. The Oxford Movement shows how profoundly it influenced certain branches of theological thought. The poetry and prose of Newman are equally instinct with it; while the fact that Newman's most strenuous antagonist among men of letters turned it to account in "Hypatia," serves to remind us how catholic the romantic influence was. The first attempts to introduce sacred scenes and persons into

fiction were regarded with grave suspicion; but these qualms soon passed, and before the century ended the 'Early Christian Novel' grew so common as to become a sort of literary nuisance. Any 'prentice hand was liable to essay one, with results equally disastrous from the standpoint of good literature and of good taste. Yet this kind of writing found multitudes of readers: sometimes because it was genuine literature, not merely setting forth the circumstances of an early day, but interpreting universal problems and experiences in terms of them; sometimes because of its dramatic, or more often melodramatic, quality; occasionally because the hearts of men were honestly warmed as they heard sacred stories retold in common speech and saw the men of Scripture at their ordinary occupations; and sometimes, it is to be suspected, because the writers of these tales permitted themselves a larger latitude in showing the seamy side of ancient life than would have been possible but for their introduction of a sacred character or two; the presence of Jemima, Keren-Happuch, or Kezia serving as antidote to many an impropriety of Zophar or Bildad.

Some of these books seem to have been composed with the idea of revolutionizing the received estimate of Bible characters; some because a 'shilling shocker' was more easily achieved in this than in any other way; and some have doubtless found place in the list of permitted Sunday reading under

pretences no less dubious than those which in Mr. Birrell's youth opened Borrow's "Bible in Spain" to him on that day. Nor has English enjoyed any monopoly in this sort of writing; other languages have borne similar fruit, and much of it has been for export. Swedish has given us Victor Rydberg's gloomy and powerful "Last Athenian," and Polish has yielded Sienkiewicz's "Quo Vadis." The late Lew Wallace's "Ben Hur" proved enormously popular in America, and has doubtless gone to Sweden and Poland to help keep the balance true. Walter Pater made use of one form of this same device in "Marius the Epicurean," and of course conferred literary distinction upon it. At the risk of giving offence in some quarters I should incline also to include here Renan's "Vie de Jésus," which has had a wide reading in English; for it is essentially a romance, marked by great literary charm, and occasional lapses into history.

Mr. Andrew Lang wrote a characteristic essay upon this class of novels a few years ago[1] in which he maintained that they answer in our day to the Miracle and Mystery Plays of the Middle Ages. Their popularity certainly goes far to show the worth of religion as a 'literary asset'; whether they will leave any abiding mark upon literature remains to be seen. It seems to me doubtful.

"John Inglesant" represents fiction of yet a fourth type, and is perhaps the best of its class.

[1] "The 'Early Christian' Novel," *Longman's Magazine*, 1898.

The reading world of the early eighties wondered that a book at once so intense, so delicate, so alive too with the spirit of chivalry and religion, should have come out of Birmingham. It is the fashion thus to sneer at great industrial centres as 'materialistic' and lacking in ideals. In point of fact it is in just such hives of industry that large ideas often find welcome, and that great enthusiasms are born and trained for service; man being of such a nature that well-organized activity along one line of his interest is likely to wake sympathetic life in another. He cannot even invent looms or speculate about tariffs indefinitely without coming upon some matter which involves his spirit. One generation, or at the utmost two, may immure themselves within the walls of 'business'; with the third, at least, some rebel is likely to appear. He may revolt against the family scheme of things which has provided his coign of material vantage; or he may on the other hand accept his surroundings as so much scaffolding to aid him in building a mansion for his soul. Peel, Gladstone, and Ruskin, for instance, all came from the commercial class, and all in their own ways were idealists, though with this difference, that while Peel seemed the legitimate and normal product of his environment, endowed to be sure with great qualities which in turn were highly developed, Gladstone brought even more brilliant gifts to the contradiction as often as to the acceptance of the norms of life

under which he had been bred, and Ruskin contradicted them altogether.

Granted Mr. Shorthouse's Quaker ancestry, with its almost equal gifts for practical efficiency and mystic vision, and there was no place whence "John Inglesant" might more fittingly have sprung than Birmingham. With its feeling for spiritual values, its respect for the convictions of an elder day, its joy in dwelling upon the half-ascetic life at Little Gidding, its sense of the pathos, mystery, one is tempted to say unreality, of ordinary human experience, its absolute assurance not merely of the Being but of the Immanence of the Divine, this book was a sort of portent, arising as it did in the heyday of physical science. To sell eighty thousand copies of a novel in a score of years no doubt seems a poor achievement enough in these days of widely advertised 'best-sellers' and single editions running into the tens of thousands; but that eighty thousand copies of such a book as this should be sold showed that the appetite for spiritual things was still alive, since few will read "John Inglesant" for mere amusement. Yet those who go a mile with its author will feel a gentle compulsion to be his companion for twain. The haunting quality of the book is not to be denied. It has the power, the eloquence, and the limitations of religion presented upon its mystical side. There are few passages in modern literature, for instance, more likely to fix themselves

in the reader's memory than the vision of the blind friar in Rome, who, on Christmas Eve, saw Christ coming again.

"Nature seemed to rally and to grow beneath Him, and heaven to bend down to touch the earth. A healing sense of help and comfort like the gentle dew, visited the weary heart." Such sentences — and the whole passage is as musical and significant — make up something more than a purple patch of rhetoric. They never give themselves over to sound and fury, or degenerate into mere bad blank verse, but suggest, with a sort of restrained passion, not so much the vision and dream of the mystic as the great realities which these foreshadow.

In some of Mr. Shorthouse's other books, "Sir Percival," for instance, the fibre of both thought and style relaxed a little and his manner of treatment approached the sentimental. Yet he remained true upon the whole to the better traditions of that delicate mysticism whence his inspiration came.

It is the fortune of mysticism to be generally misinterpreted and misunderstood. Appealing in reality to the highest and most rational in man, its false presentment makes appeal to that which is near to the lowest — those superstitions and curiosities that snatch a fearful joy from the shadows in which wizards peep and mutter. At the opposite end of this class of books among which "John Inglesant" stands so high, we may look for the type represented by Miss Corelli's "Barabbas" and "Sorrows of

Satan." It would perhaps be unfair to place Mr. Hall Caine's "The Christian" beside them, since it makes no considerable use of the pseudo-mystical. Yet the two authors seem in contrasting ways to make a similar appeal to the public — to which the public has somewhat greedily responded. The sentimental and bizarre treatment of awful or sacred themes has its reward in the gape or shudder of a day, in notoriety, and in dollars; and to such treatment the themes of religion are preëminently fitted; but literature knows its own and time brings its revenges.

The two classes which follow are especially characteristic of the last third of the century. The first of these is pretty frankly theological rather than religious; sometimes indeed theological in order that it may be anti-religious. The second occupies itself with giving social or sociological expression to a faith which is essentially, even though not often confessedly, religious.

The late George Macdonald may be said to have achieved the first great success in adapting theology to the needs of fiction, or, as some would say, in fashioning the novel into an engine of theological controversy. Other popular writers had of course dealt incidentally with theological doctrines, and Kingsley had touched them with the light of genius; but it remained for Macdonald to make them his principal theme. Few men owe a heavier debt to John Calvin, and it is one of the tributes to Calvin's

unquestionable greatness that so many lesser, though by no means little, men should have found name and fame in battling with him. Macdonald was predestined to the pen, and must in any event have written books; but it is hard to imagine what sort of books, had he not found Scottish notions of Fate and Hell to be antagonized. This is not to belittle his generous equipment for any literary task which life might have set him. "St. George and St. Michael," for instance, is a story of genuine charm, into which the elements of theology do not largely enter; and "At the Back of the North Wind" bears testimony to the quality of his imagination. But his characteristic books are of the "David Elginbrod" and "Robert Falconer" type, and perhaps his most characteristic verses — although he wrote many that had a grace and charm which these wholly lack — made up the famous epitaph,—

> Here lie I, Martin Elginbrod,
> Ha'e mercy on my soul, O God;
> As I would do, were I Lord God,
> And ye were Martin Elginbrod.

This bumptiousness of self-assertion in the greatest matters always has a popular quality, though of the cheaper sort, as some of W. E. Henley's better-known verses remain to witness; and it is a literary device in the use of which Scotsmen seem to show peculiar deftness. Characteristic of George Macdonald though it be, other and better-conditioned qualities appear to modify and sweeten it: notably

his humour, his essential moral wholesomeness, his effective command of Scottish speech, and his sympathetic insight into Scottish hearts.

The interest excited by "David Elginbrod's" appearance as the antagonist of Calvinism in the sixties was very considerable; but it was insignificant when contrasted with the sensation produced a little more than twenty years later by the advent of "Robert Elsmere" as the protagonist of 'agnosticism.' Bunyan, the reader will remember, has a character called Little-faith, who was robbed in Dead-man's Lane by Faint-heart, Mistrust, and Guilt, "three sturdy rogues." They bade him stand, at which he "looked as white as a Clout, and had neither power to fight nor fly." They took his money, at which he sang out lustily, and was promptly knocked down. They, in turn, while standing by and doubtless meditating further mischief, were put to flight by the approach of Great-grace from the City of Good-confidence, although he came alone. Then after a while Little-faith "came to himself, and getting up, made shift to scrabble on his way," bereft of his money, but — and Bunyan makes much of this — still in possession of his jewels, which the thieves in their hurry had overlooked. He missed the money for the day's convenience more than he might have missed the jewels; but the jewels were the really precious things, and so he finally discovered them to be.

One is reminded of this serio-comic experience

of Little-faith as he sees Mrs. Humphry Ward's rather feeble hero trembling before the inexorable Squire, who robs him of his faith in the authenticity of the Fourth Gospel and some other convenient cash, yet leaves him his essential loyalties to the ideals and the Person of Christianity. But when the scene is transformed, and Elsmere takes the road as a swashbuckler himself, robbing Little-faiths in turn, the play approaches farce. Nothing is much more significant of the progress which less than five-and-twenty years have wrought in distinguishing our change from our jewels, than a remembrance of the mighty pother which this man of straw raised upon religion's highway. I would not speak lightly of the spiritual struggle which Mrs. Humphry Ward portrayed; many a man found the valley which separated the land of an authority dependent upon the authenticity of documents, from the land where he lives to-day in a religion of the Spirit, organically joined to the old and yet free from its mechanisms and its fears, to be a very Valley of the Shadow of Death. He has fought Apollyons upon its borders far more redoubtable than Elsmere's Squire; and he wonders from the standpoint of present experience how that worthy could in the eighties have managed so earth-shaking a tread that prime ministers and bishops must needs be marshalled to oppose him.

The book's popularity owed much to literary qualities which have given Mrs. Ward a deservedly

high place among contemporary writers; but it owed as much to her skilful choice and treatment of a religious question which was a part of the 'clamour of the time.' For that very reason it has had its day, and is pretty secure against revival, since nothing is surer of repose than a book dealing with some over-emphasized phase of a period of transition. Yet the volume raises one significant question of literary ethics, and leaves the thoughtful reader querying how far it is justifiable to use a novel as a weapon in theological controversy. Robert Elsmere was not a very virile thinker; and the Squire, backed by his library, made short work of him. The wonder is what that library could have contained, and whether it would have had its way quite so invincibly with a man of better twisted intellectual fibre or more thorough grounding in philosophy. Granting impregnable premisses and invincible arguments, one can, of course, prove anything; but one has a right to ask that the libraries of fiction in which these are contained should be catalogued — at least in an appendix. In spite of these necessary strictures, perhaps because of them, I may be permitted to add a word of personal gratitude to this particular book and its author. For in the height of its popularity it came from a university friend to my camp in a great wilderness, was read by dim lights in intervals of hunting or of work, and found the sauce of hunger for men and books awaiting it.

Lesser novels of a somewhat similar type have been legion since the rise of the gospel of agnosticism. None of them has had any such significance as the work of George Meredith or Mr. Hardy, which stands in another class, and has been separately considered. Yet some have had a wide reading and have doubtless exerted at least a temporary influence, due in no small degree to the part which religion plays in them. Miss Beatrice Harraden's "Ships that Pass in the Night" and Olive Schreiner's (Mrs. Cronwright) "Story of an African Farm" may serve as types. The former can be pretty summarily dismissed as a debauch of sentiment. Its brief popularity is not so hard to understand. Mr. William James somewhere has a fine passage in which he describes the ethical inspiration that came to him from reading a story of martyrdom. The vogue of martyrdom is indeed eternal. Our fathers read the grewsome details of pagan and papist persecution in Foxe, partly no doubt from piety, partly too because of their frank appeal to sensation; and, rude though it all was, there was also something virile in the effect. Hearts were warmed and blood reddened. They took their pleasure sadly in traditional English fashion; but it was gaiety itself as compared with the exercise of reading Miss Harraden; for here are no martyrs, no captains of their souls, but swimmers in a sea of blind circumstance, — the figure of the ship is too vital, — with barely energy enough to make their moan before they sink. Such books

have sweetness — but it is the sweetness of overripe fruit; and tenderness — but it is the softness of decay.

"The Story of an African Farm" is a bundle of strange contradictions, far better calculated to rouse a sensation than to produce an intelligible effect, though its author is too true an artist to seek sensation for its own sake. The African Farm itself is nobly portrayed and wins the reader's heart; but the canvas is better painted than the picture. That is in the main a dance of grotesques. Tant' Sannie, the Boer woman, is a mountain of flesh animated by little but fleshly instincts; Bonaparte the hypocrite outdoes Tartuffe and Pecksniff in the extravagance of his Pharisaism; while Lyndall is less human than Undine herself. She has all of Undine's beauty, but instead of Undine's pensive longing for a soul, her elflike person houses only a bundle of nerves tortured into madness by unregulated vanity and passion. Gregory Rose, who loves her, leaves the faithful Em for her, and finally assumes woman's garb to nurse her through a fatal illness, is an effeminate cad whose one attempt to be heroic does not escape the ridiculous.

If the old German overseer be numbered among this impossible company, it must be reverently done, and only because he is too good to be true, with a childlike, Joe-Gargery[1] sort of goodness, which

[1] Of course he lacks Joe's humour. For reasons to be indicated later, it is impossible that the *Story of an African Farm* should have the humour of *Great Expectations*.

warms the heart and touches the fountains of tears. Waldo, the uncouth boy, with his mechanical genius, his dreams, his love, his great adventures of the soul, and his tragedy, might conceivably have lived; and he, with Em — sturdy, patient, necessary Em — and the Farm itself, redeems the book. It could not have been written except in a time of religious transition. The problems of a baffled faith are of its essence. It is reasonably safe to conclude that the author had at least a little of controversial purpose in writing it, and that it is in some measure an agnostic tract. If this be so there is no denying the power with which some incidents are told and some arguments presented; nor any escape from the conclusion that in a battle with hostile circumstance the only persons who really seem adequate to the struggle, whether it involve life or death, are the old German whose faith touched ecstasy, and Em with a trust simply reaching —

> to the level of every day's
> Most quiet need, by sun and candle light.

"The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford" represents another type of theological character, introspective and morbid, yet sketched with a delicate hand. It is the story of a dissenting minister who runs a course parallel to that of Robert Elsmere in respect of his opinions, but differs widely from him in the circumstances of his life. Nervous, self-conscious, anæmic, this man drifts from one parish to

another, finding each less lovely than the last; finding, what is strangest of all, nothing in the people to whom he ministers really worthy of love, laughter, or tears; swayed by doubt, the force of which is however hard to measure, because there is so little to sway; hungering for friendship, but rarely able to show himself friendly; pulling himself together at last with a modified and altruistic stoicism which serves him for faith, and building a sort of manhood, for the construction of which his career as an orthodox believer seems to furnish neither clay nor straw. It is safe to say that no greater triumph of drabness has ever been achieved in English than this Autobiography. Peter Ibbetson's residence in Pentonville presents a riot of colour beside it. Yet it is the work of a genuine literary artist whose purpose one may presume was to narrate a soul's tragedy. This purpose is accomplished; the tragedy is as real as any of Mr. Gissing's; but the whole effect is weakened by the inherent flabbiness of the hero. If one venture to pity Œdipus, it is with the pity so close akin to love. Pity flows easily enough into the wounds of Robert Elsmere and Mark Rutherford, each of whom faces a situation as full of genuine tragic possibility; but, alas! it is the pity which verges on contempt.

Of Mr. Mallock, who has chosen to cast numerous clever discussions of theology into the form of novels, I may not stop to speak, nor of the growing school of Modernists who, with Fogazzaro at their

head, are translating new theories of religious faith and practice into the speech of current literature, and finding in English an increasing host of Catholic as well as Protestant readers.

A word must, however, be accorded those who within recent years have made one phase or another of the 'social problem' the subject of their novels. The device is of course an old one. "Uncle Tom's Cabin" went round the world; Yorkshire schools and the Circumlocution Office felt the influence of Dickens; and nowadays no abuse need be so poor as to fail of its pamphlet in the form of a novel. The Chicago stock-yards have thus produced an elaborate horror known as "The Jungle"; while Mr. Jack London periodically prescribes to a sick world his purge of elemental blood and thunder. Much of this writing is hopelessly crude and temporary; indeed it remains crude and temporary even when produced by a man of large literary ability and experience like the late John Hay, as his "Breadwinners" remains to testify. But it is none the less significant both for literature and religion. It suggests the channel in which religious ideas and efforts are likely to flow in steadily growing volume. The meaning of Christianity for the mind, heart, and conduct of the individual in his relation to God and his neighbour, has been a subject of the first interest to multitudes of men for centuries. Its influence in the world has wrought immeasurable progress. Yet in all this time men have but partly

explored the content of Christ's message. The current religious unrest is largely due to the fact that new discoveries which will one day furnish food for man's soul have appeared and been greedily swallowed somewhat faster than they could be digested. It is an axiom of religion and physical science that all truth is wholesome. But truth is something more than facts, just as speech is something more than words. Truth comes from facts in right relation; and the mistake against which religion and physical science must both be on their guard, is the hasty assumption that every new and significant hypothesis is the truth. In all probability, if it be very significant and seem to chime well with great experiences that have hitherto been mysterious, it is a happy and really scientific guess to be generously but still tentatively accepted and modified in the light of further experience. At times there come a succession of such hypotheses in notable conjunction in the realm of science; and we know that we are upon the verge of great advance. So there come times when the attention of thoughtful men is focussed upon some problem of ethics or philosophy; and we are confident that, however difficult it be, new and significant steps toward its solution are to be taken.

It is such a condition as this that we face in religion, politics, and literature. Christians are discerning the wider social meanings of their faith; statesmen are considering problems of social welfare

as problems of the state, which had hitherto seemed foreign to it; and literature is concerning itself with human brotherhood or the lack of it as never before.[1]

The crudeness of much of this work, upon which I have already remarked, was to be expected, partly because men's passions were so deeply involved as to render balance and restraint difficult. Kingsley's "Yeast" deserved its name, so thoroughly did its social ferment infect the writer's style. But as time has passed, a few men of large intellectual and moral stature have undertaken, or been driven by circumstances, to work in this medium. Of these the late George Gissing is perhaps the most significant among English writers. Robert Elsmere and Mark Rutherford found refuge for their heresies in some form of 'social-settlement' work; so far forth faithfully reflecting the trend of religious thought in their day. Mr. Gissing's "The Nether World"— for I shall let that book represent him — seems at first glance to be without God and without hope; indeed he might have said that the first glance gave the true index to its state. The land to which he invites his reader is a "land of darkness, as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness." It is darkness beyond the power of social settlements to

[1] In a suggestive article in the *Hibbert Journal* for October, 1908, Prof. A. C. McGiffert has discussed at length the religious significance of the recent social awakening.

dissipate, and even the rush-light of the occasional charity-worker but serves to make it visible.

The story's texture is too close and firm to make any sketch of it quite intelligible; yet, since it is never likely to be 'popular,' a word about its salient features is necessary. Almost without relief the reader haunts the more dismal streets of London; or, if he be permitted to visit provincial towns, it is to find them drearier still. Even when he goes holiday-making, it is to the Crystal "Paliss," in a superb chapter whose character may be gathered from its title, "Io Saturnalia!" Only once is there a glimpse of gracious country quiet, and this is but the calm preceding a storm of sordid tragedy. We discern the heroine in a child, Jane, an under-fed, half-clothed, kitchen drudge, who is treated with heart-breaking cruelty by her two mistresses, a Mrs. Peckover and her daughter Clem. The latter comes close to being a great character; of the panther type, with her full-bodied sensuous beauty, her stealth, cruelty, and savage power to love or hate, she almost kills poor Jane. The child is first befriended by a young artisan, and then rescued by her grandfather, who hides his possession of wealth behind the semblance of poverty while he dreams great dreams of social regeneration which his money shall finally accomplish. With this end in view he rears his granddaughter in a sort of austere comfort, until she appears before us as a working-girl of the finest type, unassuming, gentle, serious, of keen intelligence, and high

though modest purpose. She has been thrown much with the young workingman who befriended her wretched childhood, and a natural love wakes in each. It looks for one bright moment as though an eminently fitting match might come of it, for Sidney is a man of character and sterling worth. But the father of Jane — an oily rascal of the cheap commercial type — comes back from America; is put upon the trail of his father's secret fortune, and schemes to get it. Temporary misunderstanding separates Jane and Sidney; the latter learns of the money and regards it as an obstacle; there reenters, too, a girl whom he had once loved and whose family he had befriended — a girl then as beautiful as she was vain and intensely ambitious. She had sacrificed her honour, partly in a sort of desperate protest against the misery of her family life, and partly as a possible means of getting on along the path to the stage, where she had the ambition, and presumably the power, to shine; but just as success seemed to hold out the hand of invitation, an angry rival threw vitriol in her face and balked her hopes forever. There were no large resources in her nature, though all the old elements of restlessness and vanity remained; and she went back to her father's house in black despair. The story of her family, the Hewetts, is one of the great features of the book, with its poverty, its bitterness, its patience in the character of the mother, its rebellion against fate in that of the father, its contribu-

tion to the criminal classes in the person of the clever but self-willed brother, Bob, and the half-humourous and altogether pathetic figure of Bob's wife, Pennyloaf.

Sidney, partly from chivalrous pity and partly from a reawakening of the old affection, marries the disfigured Clara. Hewett, who through misfortune, nervous stress, bad food, and somewhat irregular habits, is now nearly past work, but who still has two young and ill-trained children dependent on him, becomes with them dependent on his son-in-law; who in his turn finds the demands of an increasing and wasteful family, presided over by a wife with neither the experience nor the character to be a genuine housekeeper, not only outrunning his earnings but dissipating his savings. Yet through it all he struggles to keep his courage and to make his life of use, even though the old ambitions must be forever dismissed and a future of poverty deepening to distress faced. Jane's grandfather meanwhile had died; her graceless father has gained possession of the property and lost it; and she, without regret, except perhaps that her grandfather's dreams have vanished, takes up quietly and with womanly dignity the task of winning her daily bread again.

The last pages of the book find Jane and Sidney standing beside the old visionary's grave in Abney Park Cemetery, where they had met by chance.

"When they had stood in silence for a while, Jane told of her father's death and its circum-

stances. She told him, too, of Pennyloaf's humble security.

"'You have kept well all the year?' he asked.

"'And you, too, I hope?'

"Then they bade each other good-bye. . .

"In each life little for congratulation. He with the ambitions of his youth frustrated; neither an artist nor a leader of men in the battle of justice. She, no saviour of society by the force of a superb example; no daughter of the people, holding wealth in trust for the people's needs. Yet to both was their work given. Unmarked, unencouraged save by their love of uprightness and mercy, they stood by the side of those more hapless, brought some comfort to hearts less courageous than their own. Where they abode it was not all dark. Sorrow certainly awaited them, perchance defeat in even the humble aims that they had set themselves; but at least their lives would remain a protest against those brute forces of society which fill with wreck the abysses of the nether world."

"Where they abode it was not all dark"; this is the one ray of everlasting light which pierces the abyss. Mr. Gissing has been called the "Spokesman of Despair." It is a mistake. He is rather, when at his best, a great master of tragedy, the essence of which consists in picturing a soul contending against floods of hostile circumstance and retaining its essential integrity.

Here, and in his deep feeling for the misery of submerged life, is to be found the religious significance of Gissing and some of the lesser authors of

his type. His explicit references to religion are rare; though in "The Nether World" there is a madman who loves to sing the praises of the Lord in squalid alleys as though to point life's irony. Mad Jack has just a trifle too much method in his madness to be convincing as a lunatic; but as a literary device he does his author's bidding perfectly; and the reader is not likely to forget the scene where the counterfeiter and would-be murderer, Bob, under arrest and dying, is borne on a stretcher from his miserable lodging, while Mad Jack chants by the wayside, "All ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord; praise Him and magnify Him forever!"

Mr. Bernard Shaw has said that we must make a religion of socialism.[1] This may be, although Mr. Shaw himself seems somewhat unfitted by nature for the rôle of a self-forgetful apostle. Yet whether it be or not, there is no question that certain religious elements appear in Gissing's treatment of society and the problems which oppress it. Once at least he expressed regret that he could not give larger place to religious aspiration and motive in his work. "If I could write a book that recognized the spiritual side of man, where I now appeal to one reader, I should then speak to thousands,"[2] he confessed to a friend. There is, however, an ethical and even spiritual note in his most significant

[1] *Atlantic Monthly*, February, 1909, p. 234.

[2] "Some Recollections of George Gissing," *Gentleman's Magazine*, February, 1906, p. 14.

work, which might have reassured him. At least one critic of "The Whirlpool" (Mr. H. G. Wells) has felt the change in Rolfe's way of thinking to be emblematic of a like wholesome change for society.

"It is the discovery of the insufficiency of the cultivated life and its necessary insincerities; it is a return to the essential, to honourable struggle as the epic factor in life, to children as the matter of morality, and the sanction of the securities of civilization."[1]

[1] "The Novels of Mr. George Gissing," *Contemporary Review*, August, 1897.

CHAPTER XVI

THE NEWER FICTION. II

One class remains. It includes those novels or other works of the imagination which deal ostensibly perhaps with adventure or manners, but really with Life, and after a fashion so touched by faith or doubt as to leave a definite religious and ethical impression. The great names here are those of George Meredith[1] and Mr. Thomas Hardy; and their bare mention seems like the proffer of good wine at the feast's end. With Meredith I should group Robert Louis Stevenson and Mr. Rudyard Kipling; while Mr. Eden Phillpotts seconds Mr. Hardy.

Much that has been said of George Meredith's poetry might be repeated concerning his prose. It is characterized by the same courage, insight, sanity, and vigour; it is marred by similar mannerisms, self-assertions, and wilful obscurities; the reader of prose as well as poetry being sure of more or less contemptuous treatment at his author's hand. It is

[1] Measured by the calendar Mr. Meredith belongs, of course, with the mid-Victorians; but his popular recognition came so late, and the sources of his youth seem so perennial, that there is no anachronism in placing him here.

hurt too by an excess of subtlety which seems like the exercise of ingenuity for its own sake,[1] and by an almost intolerable tendency to indulge in aphorism. There has been in English just one writer who could afford to make a business of coining aphorisms —and that man was Tupper. Tupper was an honest son of toil who made proverbs as other men dig potatoes or mend roads. If at times he mounted the tripod and invited a sort of mantic fury, or assumed the bearing of a seventh son of a seventh son, nobody thought the less of him; to open his mouth in parables and to utter dark sayings of old was a part of the day's work; and even when the dark saying proved — as it generally did — to be a platitude, this too was borne with as belonging to the lot of proverb-makers. Jewels are one of nature's by-products; the best of them are found, not made; the process of fabrication is a suspicious one; and even professional search for them is a precarious occupation. It requires the whole of Emerson's moral and spiritual power to make even his artificial multiplication of aphorisms tolerable. With George Meredith it frankly ceased to be tolerable at all, his frequent recourse to the "Pilgrim's Scrip" in "Richard Feverel" heavily penalizing the reader of that admirable book. This is not to say that his aphorisms are

[1] Cf. the criticism of Prof. J. M. Manly in his *English Poetry, 1170–1892:* "But the gods gave him also the fatal gift of excessive intellectual ingenuity and a delight in the exercise of it; while the sole gift they denied him was self-restraint."

of the Tupper sort. Many of them are extremely clever, and many others sound as though they might be if their meaning could be discovered; but the fact remains that their pursuit or fabrication for their own sake is always a blemish on the work of genius. It is the antithesis of Shakespeare's method; gorgeously adorned though his style often is, the jewels seem all to be turned up naturally in the field which he is cultivating. They are of the essence of his matter. So much of George Meredith's wealth comes in the same legitimate way, that it is the greater pity to find him so often indulging in adornments of manner which, however splendid they may be, must still remain artificial.

Something of this same tendency to overdo what he might do almost perfectly appears occasionally in his love-scenes and his accompanying descriptions of Nature. The love-making of Richard Feverel and Lucy is deservedly famous; yet the summer and the maid both suffer from a luxuriance of sweetness that comes perilously near to a surfeit.

When all this has been said, however, we have to acknowledge in George Meredith a great creator of character, a true master of life's secrets, and a trustworthy guide along the way to such triumphs as are possible to man. He is no professional preacher; yet the religious and ethical note is sounded on nearly every page of his most characteristic work. This work may perhaps be best represented by "The Ordeal of Richard Feverel" and "The Egoist." The

former is, no doubt, the better story. It moves with force and vigour; its tragedy and comedy alike belong to life; its chief characters remain as companions after the book has been laid aside. Every father instinctively takes warning by Sir Austin and his system; every would-be man of the world by Adrian, whose clever selfishness, without abating jot or tittle of its spirit, is unmasked with complete effectiveness; every boy who would master circumstance finds in Richard a comrade whose great chance for victory is frustrated because he has not learned that self-conquest must come first; and this is still true, whether the fault be assigned to Richard himself or to Sir Austin and the System. To the "Pilgrim's Scrip" I have already paid my disrespects; but this too is a mine of wisdom for those who can stomach the soil in which they have to dig.

The average reader and the critic alike are disposed to balk at a too frank display of the moral in a fable. Yet he must be hypercritical indeed who does not admire the perfect frankness and the consummate ability of the chapter in which Sir Austin Feverel, visiting London in search of a bride for Richard, confers incidentally with two old friends. Both were Members of Parliament, "useful men, though gouty, who had sown in their time a fine crop of wild oats, and advocated the advantage of doing so, seeing that they did not fancy themselves the worse for it." He found one with an imbecile son and the other with consumptive daughters. "So

much," he wrote in the Note-book, "for the Wild Oats 'theory.'" He meets the eldest of the charming but hectic girls, and the degenerate boy; who almost persuade him to mount the pulpit and cry aloud his convictions upon wild oats and their harvest. "This universal ignorance of the inevitable consequence of sin is frightful," he says to himself. "The wild oats plea is a torpedo that seems to have struck the world and rendered it morally insensible."

Though Mr. Meredith is rarely so explicit, this whole chapter entitled "The System Encounters the Wild Oats Special Plea," is fairly representative of his ethical tone. It is as wholesome as ripe nuts, possessing at once substance and flavour.

"Richard Feverel" deals with life as a thing of deeds and ethical relations; "The Egoist" searches the hearts and tries the reins of the children of men. It is in some respects less possible than "Richard Feverel"; in others it is more intimate and real. No fool could ever be so wise, nor any wise man such a fool, as Sir Willoughby Patterne; and yet the reader who fails to see at times that he is looking in a mirror, as he traces the processes of Sir Willoughby's respectable folly, has cause to distrust his eyesight. He will feel the exaggeration of the character and be often on the point of exclaiming against it, only to discover that all unconsciously a window has been opened into his own soul, and that the thing which he is about to decry

has the most intimate and indubitable reality. To read "The Egoist" discerningly is to undergo conviction of sin, but in a warm bath of humour which mitigates its rigour. The whole realm of fiction scarcely contains so humbling and yet so good-natured a book. It is a book to dwell upon; its minor characters and features all have significance; even though thrown into an unduly high light for the moment, they generally bear examination and justify themselves under it. The sprightliness of Colonel DeCraye and the pedantic pomposity of Dr. Middleton, are, to be sure, somewhat too continuous and self-consistent; but who dare bring any charge against the hero-worship of the ladies, Eleanor and Isabel, and the maiden-aunt agility with which they execute a *volte-face* at Sir Willoughby's bidding; it being true, of course, that this loyalty to another is itself but a refined and glorified egoism, since he is their Nephew, they his Aunts, and all together live, move, and have their being in the sacred and sustaining medium of the Family. Lætitia and Clara are both women whom the reader writes down gladly in his list of friends; not so much because they are wholly admirable, as because their very faults are those of an altogether human and feminine inconsistency. Crossjay is a real and engaging boy, and Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson, though far too infallibly clever, is, as Chorus, worthy of a place beside Mrs. Cadwallader in "Middlemarch."

Here, too, as in "Richard Feverel," there is no concealment of the ethical — I should even venture to add the spiritual — significance of the story as a whole. Vernon Whitford is no prig; he is simply a plain man with excellent intellectual equipment, high courage, and an honest conviction or two. These convictions, singularly enough, seem close akin to those of a Teacher Who said, "Blessed are the meek," — though never, as some seem to suppose, "Blessed are the mawkish," — and again, "What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" They appear, moreover, to be the convictions, not of Vernon Whitford merely, but of his creator and author. He does not translate them into conventional religious or ethical speech, but in his own fashion he is ever setting his readers face to face with new incarnations of their truth. The men and women who people his novels are characters instead of puppets; they have wills to use and use them; choices to make and make them; wherever they are, their presence is significant; the scene which they people gains reality and takes on meaning from them; they dominate instead of merely adorning it. Tragedy and comedy are possible, because personality is real. The reader feels the will to live, and to control circumstance in the interests of the larger life of himself and his fellows, refreshed in him.

This same message — if 'message' be not too homiletic a term — is delivered by Stevenson and

Kipling. Neither is a great novelist. "Treasure Island," the story of pure adventure, retains its primacy for me among Stevenson's novels; and, with the exception of "Kim," Mr. Kipling can scarcely be said to have written novels at all. But in both the will to live appears; the dominion of man over circumstance asserts itself. So strong is this assertion indeed that in one instance the former laid himself open to criticism by seeming to dwarf a character in order to give circumstance a chance.[1]

It is in the essays, tales, and letters, however, that Stevenson reveals the finer qualities of his imagination; to which, at the risk of being laughed at, I should unhesitatingly add one of the Fables. Their author suspected his possession of a special gift for this sort of writing, which of itself might lead us to look askance at it; and some critics would gladly rule the Fables out of the canon of his works. They are, to be sure, fragmentary and somewhat crude; yet "The House of Eld" remains a thing of singular, though as yet half-recognized, power. The casual reader may accept or reject it as a grim setting forth of the burden which religion often lays on men; a second glance should suffice to show that the emphasis really falls upon the inevitable affinity of the soul for faith. Religion may indeed become a fetter; in the Fable, Jack, to be rid of it, slays his father, mother, and uncle.

[1] The younger brother in *The Master of Ballantrae*. Compare Sir Leslie Stephen's criticism, in his essay on Stevenson.

The gyve drops from his leg; but almost in his own despite he stoops, lifts it, and lays it in his bosom. As he returns along the highway, it is to discover that the people whom he meets have been delivered, even as he, from the shackle upon the right ankle, but only to lose no time in clasping another upon the left; and to his questions they reply, "that was the new wear, for the old was found to be a superstition." Then he looked at them again and saw that the new fetter was eating like an ulcer into the left ankle, while the wound upon the right was not yet healed.

> Old is the tree and the fruit good,
> Very old and thick the wood.
> Woodman, is your courage stout?
> Beware! the root is wrapped about
> Your mother's heart, your father's bones;
> And like the mandrake, comes with groans.

So, in characteristically lame verse, he points his fable's moral. The thing is true within the limits which he sets it. Faith with its fruitage of good works is for man's sustenance; it is as germane to his experience and his need as bread; yet it may be treated, not as the living source of deeds, but as a dead and completed system of beliefs or forms, when it becomes a burden for his shoulders and a shackle upon his freedom. If then he tries to get rid by violence of the whole thing, behold it is only to exchange a burden of formal religion for a burden of superstition, or to shift a shackle from one

leg to the other. Even the man who seems to succeed in complete emancipation, yet carries the old fetter as a memento in his bosom, and sits down in a lone house sometimes to weep beside the bodies of those whom his iconoclastic zeal has slain.

The truth is almost savagely put in the parable; but it is echoed in more gracious terms again and again in poem, essay, and letter. Stevenson was as true a Scotsman as ever lived in his appetite for religious discourse. His expression of it was of course unconventional, but his taste for its substance was sound.

> For still the Lord is Lord of might;
> In deeds, in deeds, he takes delight,

was, no doubt, of the essence of his faith. Yet he was no mere Son of Thunder singing the praises of an almighty demon of energy. There is a spirit in man, born of God, which welcomes life's adventure, its bitter with its sweet, confident that some secret of mastery exists for such as can discern it.

His ears were always open to the more sombre notes in "the still sad music of humanity"; and in the "Memoirs of an Islet" there is explicit reference to his youthful sensibility to the Franco-Prussian war, then in progress, and its suggestion of "that other war which is as old as mankind, and is indeed the life of man: . . . the grinding slavery of competition; the toil of seventy years, dear-bought bread, precarious honour, the perils and pitfalls, and the poor rewards." This is exactly the vision

which seems to have driven so many generous minds mad with pessimism; but Stevenson was rescued, as he thought, by his own experience of suffering and acquaintance with an ever-hovering death.

"I used myself to rage when I saw sick folk going by in their Bath-chairs; since I have been sick myself (and always when I was sick myself), I found life, even in rough places, to have a property of easiness. That which we suffer ourselves, has no longer the same air of monstrous injustice and wanton cruelty that suffering wears when we see it in the case of others."[1]

This consciousness of a something in man that dominates the body and can transmute all experience into good or ill, was part and parcel of everything he wrote; even his dreams were haunted by it, as "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," which was the elaboration of a dream, remains to testify. This is of course a latter-day echo, in rather grewsome tones, of Plato's two dæmons, and its essential truth to experience was demonstrated by its welcome not merely from those who coveted a shudder, but from thoughtful folk who saw in it a mirror held up to nature — a magic mirror with power to reflect even the spectres which haunt our souls.

No one can read Stevenson or Kipling without sharing, at least for the time, their conviction of a creative and masterful power underlying appearances. Whether it be called human or divine, men-

[1] Letter to William Archer, October 30, 1885.

tal or spiritual, makes relatively little difference; it is characterized by a self-conscious will, which, even while transcending our definitions, impinges most significantly upon our experience. This makes on the one hand for reverence and on the other for courage, since it at once humbles and emboldens men. In Kipling, for instance, the might of the sea is always asserting itself against the physical impotence of man, who yet overcomes and subdues it to his service. He may of course be physically beaten in the conflict, but, even so, wins a genuine victory so long as he maintains the integrity of his soul. Hence the interest of both writers in such adventures as Gloucester fishermen or the builders of the Northern Lights experienced; hence, too, Stevenson's essays "Æs Triplex" and "The English Admirals."

Their common love of the ghostly is but a mood of the same feeling for the spiritual, and ranges from the horror of "Thrawn Janet" or "At the End of the Passage" to the delicate beauty of "The Brushwood Boy" and "They." The highly figurative language of Scripture has had its way with both, and both in turn have made their contributions to the literature of devotion, Stevenson in the "Vailima Prayers" and Kipling in his "Recessional."

Widely as I feel compelled to differ from the bitter philosophy which undermines so much of Mr.

Hardy's work, it is well-nigh as difficult to point a critical pen at him as at Wordsworth himself; and for a similar reason. Other writers may have painted as charming landscapes, or 'described Nature' with as great accuracy, or framed their work as elaborately in its surroundings of earth, sky, and season; but these two stand together and preëminent in their identification of Nature with the lot of man. When Wordsworth thinks of the sheepfold which Michael reared with such painful art and finally left unfinished, he sees in it something more than a picture of a broken life. The rough ground and waiting stones seem instinct with a spirit which consorts with that of the broken-hearted shepherd. So, when the poet listens to the sea, it is more than a rolling and breaking surf that he hears: —

> Listen! the mighty Being is awake,
> And doth with his eternal motion make
> A sound like thunder — everlastingly.

In like manner Mr. Hardy, looking at the grey upland where Tess and her girl companion work in the turnip-field, sees something more than the spacious bleakness portending snow; he communes with the very Spirit of Winter, which not merely possesses the fields but struggles for possession of the woman's life. In "The Dynasts," a work whose genuine power goes far toward atoning for the essential feebleness and extravagance of "Jude," Mr. Hardy introduces certain Phantom Intelligences who act

as chorus. They comprise the Spirit of the Tears, the Spirit of the Pities, with Spirits Sinister and Ironic. The reader at once recognizes in them old acquaintances, now for the first time, it may be, acknowledged by the author himself, but who have long spoken through him from their haunts in Egdon Heath, or The Chase, or the glades where the Woodlanders dwelt. Yet to speak of heath and glade as the haunts of these Spirits is to understate the truth. Others have told us of haunted woods or moors. In Mr. Hardy's work such features of the landscape are bodies, half for the hiding and half for the expression and achievement of these souls. But they do not therefore cease to be real; no writer of recent fiction has surpassed Mr. Hardy in the art of making a country-side live before the reader's eye, and its very weather play upon his hearthstone.

Perhaps the fact that the human experience depicted in his books is itself so often little more than a sort of "cosmic weather" — either without law or else the sport of some law the formula of whose working is beyond us — has skilled him in the transfusion of his scenes with atmosphere. Spring, for instance, when it comes to heath and moor, is by no means unconscious of its struggle with hard natural conditions, and for some of us gains welcome from the fact. Summer brings light and warmth, to be sure, but little of that exuberant lushness in which Richard Feverel met Lucy. It

tends as often to express itself in terms of the strong, glowing weather in which Clym Yeobright cut furze on Egdon Heath ; or the scene grows torrid as Mrs. Yeobright takes her tragic and fatal journey across the moor to her son's cottage. Autumn is, however, Mr. Hardy's season. Its moods are many, but his chime with them all. The sweet September weather, with its "dry and rustling undergrowths of spear-grass," its general sense of the fulness of time, and its air of resignation, brings into his work perhaps the nearest approach to peace that appears there. Its sterner moods are, however, so germane to his purposes that, if Autumn be his season, November is as certainly his month. It is in November twilight — one suspects the Saturday afternoon to be an unconscious touch — that "The Return of the Native" opens, and the face of Egdon Heath reveals itself to us. Mr. Hardy is chary of providing his characters with souls; but he is lavish in furnishing them to his high places; and the spirit of Egdon Heath might fairly be called his tutelary genius. Nothing could be more characteristic than the three chapter headings with which this novel opens: I. "A Face on which Time makes but little Impression" (the face of the Heath); II. "Humanity appears upon the Scene, Hand in Hand with Trouble"; III. "The Custom of the Country." These three things, the grave, quiet face of Nature, the trouble, to which man is born as the sparks fly upward, and the established fashion of a coun-

try-side, its paths, speech, traditions, — all that men pass on from one generation to another to distinguish and give character to a district, — are of the essence of his manner and matter both. Busy little people who hurry from place to place pursuing 'local colour' might well take knowledge of him. The pursuit of local colour for its own sake is as futile as the pursuit of 'culture.' Neither is an entity to be run to earth, captured, and brought home in triumph. The so-called 'local colour' of Mr. Hardy is that in which experience has dyed him like his own reddleman of the Heath.

A remarkable dual movement has characterized the development of Mr. Hardy's art. In his ability to construct and tell a story, — to portray the changeful face of Nature, and to reveal in it the counterpart of man's constant struggle, with its small successes and great defeats, — he has shown almost uninterrupted progress; indeed he may be said completely to have outgrown and sloughed off the crudities of such early attempts as "A Pair of Blue Eyes," "Two on a Tower," and "A Laodicean." On the other hand, his art has deteriorated in so far as he has become a well-nigh passionate preacher of pessimism. One can almost count the pulpit stairs as he has climbed them between "Far from the Madding Crowd" and "Tess." I choose "Tess" rather than "Jude" to mark this climax, because "Tess" is a great defiant arraignment of life and its contradictions, while "Jude" is the utterance of

a preacher who has wrought himself so far beyond the point of self-control as to absolve his hearers from seriously weighing what he says. As this progress toward special and almost impassioned pleading has gone on, two elements of Mr. Hardy's power have diminished and even threatened to disappear. One is his use of the rustic chorus; the other is his humour. In the earlier Wessex novels the chorus is frequently in evidence and its humourous philosophy always rewards the reader. Life in "Far from the Madding Crowd" had its tragedies, but was not yet altogether tragic. Joseph Poorgrass, — the never-to-be-forgotten Joseph, who in the passion of his meekness rivals the curate of Assesmilk-cum-Worter in the "Bab Ballads" — sums up the philosophy of the book. Its closing paragraph runs, —

"Then Oak laughed, and Bathsheba smiled (for she never laughed readily now), and their friends turned to go. 'Yes, I suppose that 's the size o 't,' said Joseph Poorgrass, with a cheerful sigh as they moved away; 'and I wish him joy o' her; though I were once or twice upon saying to-day with holy Hosea, in my Scripture manner, which is my second nature, "Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone." But since 'tis as 'tis, why, it might have been worse, and I feel my thanks accordingly.'"

Joseph's "cheerful sigh" fairly depicts the temper of Mr. Hardy's work at this period. Now and then the cheer quite chases the clouds away, as in

the series of early sketches called "Under the Greenwood Tree." "The Return of the Native," "The Mayor of Casterbridge," and "The Woodlanders" mark the next stage. There are elements of genuine tragedy in them all — tragedy of the classic Greek type in "The Mayor of Casterbridge," in which a strong man is overborne by Fate; though Michael Henchard's strength is really physical rather than moral.

"The Return of the Native" and "The Woodlanders" represent perhaps their author's most characteristic work. As the former introduces us to the great presence of Egdon Heath in November, so the latter opens "upon the lowering evening of a by-gone winter's day." The essential dignity of such children of the soil as Giles Winterborne and Marty South shows in fine contrast with the moral cheapness of men like Wildeve and women like Felice Charmond. Mr. Hardy rarely succeeds in giving a heroine either mind or soul enough to balance her big and passionate body, unless she be of Marty South's humble type. The women who pretend to place and power upon his stage, like Felice, Bathsheba Everdene, Eustacia Vye, and Tess, are cast in one mould: it is physically generous, almost voluptuous indeed, and the passion which sways the character and so often rules the story is correspondingly fleshly; sometimes indeed it is frankly gross. Their fate is, to be sure, foreordained as certainly as the failure

of Winterborne's party: "If so 't were doomed to be so," says old Creedle. But the depths of pessimism are not yet sounded. "A soul's specific gravity is permanently less than that of the sea of troubles into which it is thrown," comments Mr. Hardy, incidentally. Hence, since men in some degree at least control events, either in the interest of confusion or of order, tragedy and comedy are still possible; there is room for the rustic chorus, with its note of passing events, and its humourous philosophy. The "cheerful sigh" still finds place.

With the advent of "Tess" and "Jude," however, Mr. Hardy's gloom deepens.

> There is a tide in the affairs of men
> Which, taken any way you please, is bad,

once sang Mr. Kipling; and it floods these two books. To recur to the figure of the preacher, Mr. Hardy is fairly in the pulpit at last and the text is from Ecclesiastes. The chorus with its comment and implication is discarded. The preacher speaks directly, and with a clearness that is unmistakable. There seems at first to be a deepening of the tragic note; but maturer thought reveals the fact that, while the superstructure of tragedy is here in richer measure than ever, half its foundation has been dug away. "It is then" (when the constraint of day and the suspense of night neutralize each other) "that the plight of being alive becomes attenuated to its least possible dimensions." To such a pass has

Mr. Hardy come. And later on, when the black flag which signalled the execution of Tess for murder rose over her prison tower, he comments, "'Justice' was done, and Time, the Archsatirist, had had his joke out with Tess." This is rather the tragedy of a disordered liver than of a contradicted and vanquished life; for its mood is at once petulant and dogmatic.

It is here that a common issue must be joined with Mr. Hardy and Mr. Phillpotts. Both have great gifts; both are keenly responsive to the appeal of earth, sky, and season; both are quick to discern the humour of little incongruities and the tragedy of great contradictions; both appreciate the place and play of sexual instinct, sometimes as mere fleshly passion and again sublimated into a love stronger than death, in human affairs; both find almost too frank a delight in dwelling upon its less seemly accessories and incidents; both have shown a notable command of simple pathos in such characters as Mr. Hardy's Marty South and Mr. Phillpotts's Nicholas Edgecombe; both have depicted tragedy of the most genuine sort; and each has upon occasion set an obstacle in the path to his own greatest achievement by assuming the dress and manner of a high-priest of Fate. This special pleading in Fate's behalf is strewn plenteously through "Tess" and "Jude." It will be enough for readers of Mr. Phillpotts to turn back to "The Secret Woman" and its chapter on "The

Talking Men." But the surplusage of theology is after all a minor blemish; the larger harm befalls when they introduce a malevolent Chance into the place of rule in their stories and by so much sap the personality of their characters. To rob a man of character, by which I mean will, vital personal force, and the moral power to dominate events, — all, in short, that is understood by the Image of God in him, — and thereby to further the dominion of a malignant demon, is not the path to tragedy's greater heights. Yet it is a divinity of this type who shapes the ends of Jude. Tess seems a better developed character physically and morally, and worth Fate's hunting. The episode of her undoing in the Chase, although somewhat too largely dwelt upon, is honest tragedy; but when it comes to the long chapter of malevolent events which divorced her from the man she loved and gave her over again to the man she finally murdered, the note under Clare's door which he must needs miss, and the letter to Brazil which must needs miscarry, the *diabolus ex machina* becomes an obsession.

Mr. Phillpotts admirably illustrates the same tendency in "The Secret Woman," a book which, in spite of grave faults, develops a high degree of tragic power; but it is tragedy which is robbed of half its rights by the sheer malice of Chance. "The Wind Bloweth where it Listeth" is the title of a chapter in which a gust of wind shaking a casement, and a dash of rain upon its panes, drown a

wronged wife's offer of forgiveness to her erring husband. He did not hear; she supposed him to have heard without any reply, and the iron fastened itself deeper in her soul. A little later, while the storm still raged, — a magnificent storm, for which all readers who love weather for its own sake must bless Mr. Phillpotts, — she, so crazed with grief and anger as to be deaf in turn to his penitent words, found him at the curb of the deep farm-well. Tears of sorrow stood in his eyes, but these she could not see; she only heard him whistling, as was his wont in times of agitation. She struck him across the neck, in anger certainly, but with no thought of what was to ensue; when he lost his balance and plunged to his death below. No paraphrase can do justice to Mr. Phillpotts's narrative; but not even his ability as a narrator can hide the assumption of a malevolent demon working his will upon these puppets under cover of the storm. It is no mere happening: the wind really bloweth not where it listeth, but where this evil genius compels. Hence the tragic force of the story at this point is seriously weakened; but swells again, not only to reality, but to a high degree of power, as the course of Ann Redvers's later life develops through remorse and pain to a penitence which leads her not only to give herself up to punishment, but to labour after her imprisonment is over, for the spiritual recovery of her husband's paramour, Salome Westaway. The latter speaks: —

"'There are things too small for God to heed, Ann. My broken life is one of them.'

"'Never — never! All — to the pattern of the frost on these dear graves — be the thought-out invention of our God. Nought 's too small for Him, Salome; an' nought 's too great. If He 's suffered even me — if He 's let the candle of hope flicker even yet in my evil heart — how much more you! Be your sad soul a small thing to Him? . . . Believe there 's no darkness on earth that God an' man working together can't turn into light. I 've larned that; an' I 've larned what God's forgiveness means. Ours be but the shadow of His. He comes three parts of the way. The haste of God, Salome! Quicker 'n the lightning. A sigh of sorrow brings Him, or one humble thought.'"

Now it chances that Mr. Phillpotts is — or recently was — an active member of an aggressive Rationalist Society; and in justice to himself, must be regarded as speaking solely in character here. The fact which I wish to point out is, that for his really victorious characters, — for those, that is, who seem adequate to circumstance, — he still has recourse to men and women of faith. Their relative orthodoxy or heterodoxy matters little enough. Uncle Chirgwin in "Lying Prophets," Nicholas Edgecombe in "The River," Ann Redvers in "The Secret Woman," and Humphrey Baskerville in "The Three Brothers," are all characters instead of marionettes. In fiction as in life some faith or other seems needful to ultimate conquest of circumstance.

It is also eminently needful to humour, for reasons that have been repeatedly indicated in the foregoing chapters; since the essence of humour is a fairly confident attitude toward the confusion of events. These cross-currents of experience may simply amuse, they may absorb the serious attention, or they may threaten utter loss. The man who can maintain his integrity in face of their wrath because of his faith in a Power with whose plan of beneficence his life is mysteriously bound up, is also the man who can best afford to smile at their play. Take away this man's faith in God and his own soul, supply its place with a theory of the malignant lordship of Chance, and his laughter must lose its heartiness, while his smile fades into wistfulness or scorn.

Not too much should be made of the fact that the admirable choruses of Mr. Hardy and Mr. Phillpotts are generally composed of simple-hearted and believing men. This is of course a necessity. But it is worth while to note that the rustic philosophy which seasons these novels like salt is largely a product of religious teaching and finds its best expression in Scripture language. From Mr. Hardy's Joseph Poorgrass, "sorrowing like a man in travail," to Mr. Phillpotts's Thomas Gollop, speculating upon his reception at the Judgement Seat should he cut his throat and appear untimely like one who might go to a party "afore you 'm invited, — a very presumpshuss and pushing thing to

be sure," these men not only fall back naturally upon the words and thoughts of religion to express their views of life, but their humour gains a sort of wholesome force from the contact. They practically disappear from the precincts of "Jude" and "Tess," whose bitterness must be their poison; but in "The Dynasts" the reader is permitted to welcome them again. Here, in his latest and in some respects his noblest work, Mr. Hardy arrays a great stage and summons great figures to play upon it. It seems to have occurred to him that if there be justification for the malignant demons who haunt his later novels, an equal right exists for the occasional introduction of beneficent powers; indeed, toward the close one half suspects him of making room for God. He dare not go further than the neuter pronoun 'It' in his references to this mysterious Power; but he has succeeded in creating men and women with enough semblance of the divine image to compel events. Oddly enough, he calls them puppets here, and reveals the demon at whose behests they move. In "Jude" he called them men and women and the malignant presences were hidden. Yet in "The Dynasts" his puppets prove to be men, as in "Jude" his men shrink to forlorn dolls: perhaps because in "The Dynasts" he is portraying a veritable world-drama; perhaps, too, because upon and behind the curtain of events there moves an Immanent Will that is already justifying the presage of Mr. Hardy's final Chorus.

But — a stirring thrills the air
Like to sounds of joyance there
That the rages
Of the ages
Shall be cancelled, and deliverance offered from the darts that were,
Consciousness the Will informing, till It fashion all things fair!

We have at last arrived at the end of a way somewhat longer than I expected upon setting out. In the journey my endeavour has been, not so much to prove a thesis as to point out certain things by the wayside which seem to have significance and to belong together. We have seen, for instance, that a time of religious revival is generally followed by a period of literary activity; and that great literature relates itself by a sort of instinct to the themes of religion, though the relation may be by way of protest or revolt instead of acceptance. Furthermore, this interest in religion has shown a singular vitality, despite all attempts to eradicate it by violence, to starve it by neglect, to belittle it with contempt, or to weaken it by patronage. James Mill, for instance, was as successful as any man could hope to be in treating religion as though it were a nonentity in the rearing of his famous son; but he could not preclude John Mill from finally developing an intense interest in religious problems, or from writing essays in theology, which are among the most memorable of his works. It has appeared, moreover, that whenever new scientific theories upon questions

of human origin or destiny were developed, it has been impossible to prevent a canvassing of their religious significance. The literature of these subjects, as distinguished from mere technical treatises or essays upon them, has often been distinctly theological, — some of Huxley's "Lay Sermons," and Romanes's "Candid Examination" may serve as illustrations, — and has owed its appeal to the general public in no small degree to this fact.

The stress of such a period of doubt and readjustment has also coloured much of the century's later poetry and fiction. The ever-present 'social problem' can never be discussed for very long, either in essay or novel, without implicating religion, and no candid reader will deny the religious element in works as different as Ebenezer Elliott's poems and George Gissing's "The Nether World." I have not hesitated to accord a wide range to religion here; but it is no wider than the explicit definition of the prophet, "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God"; or than the two inclusive Commandments of Christ. To have limited the scope of religion to the accepted sway of any dogmatic system would have been to belittle our discussion beyond reason, since it has ever been a prerogative of religion, as cheering to her disciples as it is vexing to her foes, willingly to leave the forms of one generation as soon as they have hardened, for some more vital if not more stately mansion in the next.

I have further thought it right and germane to

my theme to point out the significant number of men of letters who have been bred in the homes of ministers of religion, or who have received at least a part of their training in preparation for the ministry. When the fact is noted that in the latter class are met such diverse types as George Crabbe, Coleridge, James Mill, Carlyle, and Kingsley, some of my readers may be moved to question whether this influence of religion upon letters has been for better or for worse, and I have declined to dogmatize; although my own conviction is that here the debt of literature to religion is both real and great.

No such doubt will arise, however, with reference to the part which the language of religion has played in the making of literature. The taste of the individual author in his use of religious phrase or reference may be questioned,[1] but the adaptation of religious language to the purposes of poet, essayist, historian, and novelist, when these are at their best, is not to be gainsaid. No other field has proved so fertile in literary allusions of universal import as the Old and New Testaments.

The debt has been mutual; and while literature has gained in depth, range, and power of utterance from religion, religion has as truly profited in humanity, balance, and ability to accord its message to the needs of men from the influence of letters. The popular study of the Bible as literature is a product

[1] As for instance Thackeray's use of Psalm CXXVI in *Henry Esmond*. Cf. *ante*, chap. ix.

of the century which we have traversed; in certain directions the result has seemed revolutionary, and has been attended by the disorder and loss always incident to revolution; but faithful men are confident of ultimate gain, and much of this gain along the lines indicated has already been realized.

Great literature can spring only from the deeper experiences of life. It can gain imperishable form only through high and sustained flights of the trained imagination. Religion searches the depths of man's heart; while at the same time it has been a chief inspirer of his imagination, holding visions before his eyes and fixing his thoughts upon themes of origin and destiny. It has led him moreover to think of these things, not as mere idle dreams or curious problems, but as personal concerns of vital moment. The influence of religion upon literature has been great, because the experience of religion has upon the whole been real.

INDEX

"A. L. O. E.," 504.
Abraham, 17.
Accomplishment, emphasis put upon, in the 19th century, 31.
Adams, Prof. G. B., his address *History and the Philosophy of History*, 495.
'Adaptation to environment,' 134.
Adonais, Shelley's, quoted, 126.
Aeschylus, animated by religious idea of tragedy, 22.
Agassiz, L. J. R., 414.
Agnosticism, and agnostics, 412–415, 442; novels of, 517–524.
Alastor, Shelley's, preface to, quoted, 118.
Alton Locke, Kingsley, 297.
Ancient Mariner, The, Coleridge's, a work of genius, 84.
Anti-slavery agitation, 175.
Aphorisms, the making of, 534, 535.
Apologia, Newman, 196.
Archer, William, cited, 460, 489 n., 491 n.
Ariel and Caliban, Coleridge's criticism upon the characters of, 107.
Arnold, Matthew, on Wordsworth, 61, 72; on Coleridge, 77; his criticism of Byron, 106; under forty when he wrote of doubt and disillusion, 424; religion a chief source of his inspiration, 431; compared with Clough, 431, 432; compared with his father, 432, 433; note of blithesomeness, almost wholly lacking in his poetry, 433; his use of themes and language of religion, 434; what his poems represent, 435; religion in his writings, 437; has French felicities of style, 438; master phrase-maker, 439; his mind saturated with Biblical and devotional thought, 439; compared with Froude, 440, 441; inconsistency in, 442.
Arnold, Thomas, 432, 436.
'Art for art's sake,' 111.
Ashford, Isaac, in Crabbe's *The Parish Register*, 53, 54.
Ashley, Lord, 330.
Austen, Jane, and Maria Edgeworth, 242, 243; her gallery of miniatures, 245; her characters instinct with a real life, 246; tolerant of her characters, 246, 247; the characteristics of her work those which religion tends to foster, 248; her influence on Scott, 248, 249.
Autobiography of Mark Rutherford, The, 522, 523.
Aylmer's Field, Tennyson, quoted, 367.

Baden Powell. *See* Powell, Baden.
Bagehot, Walter, on the First Edinburgh Reviewers, 127; his estimate of the Whig ideal, 139; on the Whig aversion to mysticism, 144, 145; on Jeffrey's criticism of Wordsworth, 145; paraphrased, 157; on sacred poets, 192; on Scott, 253, 257; on Tennyson's *Enoch Arden*, 384 n.
Bailey, P. J., "Festus," 425, 426.
Barbauld, Mrs., *Diary*, quoted, 31.
Barère, Macaulay on, 182.
Barrie, J. M., 504.
Beagle, the, 403.
Benn, A. W., his *History of English Rationalism in the Nineteenth Century*, 185 n.; cited, 312 n., 315 n., 316, 318, 323; his insinuations against men of science, 412 n.
Bentham, Jeremy, 312, 318.
Bible, its influence upon the national language and literature, 16, 364, 365; its influence on

Browning and Tennyson, 364–369, 382; quoted, 478. *See* Scripture.
Biglow Papers, Lowell, 346, 347.
Biology, 410.
Birrell, Rt. Hon. A., *Obiter Dicta* cited, 155; on Newman, 196.
Blackwood's, on the Conservative side, 129, 131; writers for, 130; early volumes of, moderate tone in, 132, 133; blazed the way for a fair reception for believers and skeptics, 148–150.
Blake, William, mystical element in, 58; perhaps not wholly sane, 58; his *Reeds of Innocence*, 59; *The Tyger*, 59; James Thomson's poem on, 59, 60.
Blunt, W. S., 488.
Book of Common Prayer, 16.
Brontë, Charlotte and Emily, 267, 268, 270, 271.
Brooke, Stopford A., *Poetry of Tennyson* cited, 384 n.; cited, 392 n.
Brown, T. E., his strictures on Cowper, 48 n.; his *My Garden*, 492.
Browning, Robert, quotation from, on death, 349; compared and contrasted with Tennyson, 351–356, 360, 361, 365–369, 376, 386, 387; did not treat the English language with a decent respect, 353, 354; his perverse cacophonies, 355, 356; treasures sometimes appear in his worst verse, 356, 357; has suffered and deserved much at the hands of commentators, 357; his alleged obscurity, 357; his *Sordello* translated into English by David Duff, 357; *Sordello* could not have been made an 'easy' poem, 358; the key to his work, 359; essentially religious, 360; represents the non-conforming element in English life and verse, 361; cosmopolitan, 361, 362; his non-conforming manner of approaching a subject, 363; his connection with religion, 363, 364; his relation to the Bible, 364–369; prefigures something of Pragmatism, 376; his pathos, 388, 389; religious poems, 389, 390; *Pippa Passes*, 390, 391; his method in using religious and ethical material, 391, 392; reason for early neglect and later vogue, 392; secret of his influence, 393.
Bryant, W. C., heir to the Puritan heritage, 341, 342; moved in the realm of the concrete, 344, 345.
Buchanan, Robert, 488.
Bulwer-Lytton, Sir Edward, 294, 295.
Bunyan, John, compared with Clough, 427, 428; cited, 517; a living allegory, 500, 501.
Burke, Edmund, comforted by Wilberforce's *Practical View, etc.*, 172; on Wilberforce, 173.
Burns, Robert, on Cowper's *The Task*, 44, 45; inspired to sing and fly, 55; revealed himself unreservedly in his verse, 55; was weak, 55; *The Cottar's Saturday Night* his best poem, 55, 56; religious feeling in, 55–57; Longfellow's verses on, 56, 57.
Bushnell, Horace, 337–339.
Butler, Samuel, *Hudibras*, a burlesque, 500, 501.
Byron, Lord, combined something of Mirabeau, Danton, and Napoleon in himself, 92, 93; his career not to be understood apart from the public of the day, 94, 95; peculiarities of, 95; a *poseur*, 96; impertinent in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, 97; the centre of all is himself, 97; his cynicism becomes him and is essential to him, 98; felt the freedom of the open sea, 99; his tragedy spoiled by his element of misanthropy, 100; his shipwreck scenes, 100–102; his inventiveness and ingenuity, 103; tributes of Goethe, Mazzini, and Castelar to, 103 n.; the author's feelings on re-reading, 103, 104; use of the sneer and the mocking question in *Cain*, 104, 105; an apostle of revolution, 105, 106; contrasted with Shelley, 107, 108; the secret of his perversity, 108; Britain necessary to him, 362.

Caine, Hall, 515.
Caliban and Ariel, Coleridge's criticism upon the characters of, 107.
Calvinism, and Cowper, 40, 41; of the Evangelicals, 185; a translation of Stoicism into terms of Christianity, 187; had been essentially rationalistic, 343; dealt with the race, 343; and George Macdonald, 515–517.
Camera, may prove untruthful, 498.
Campbell, J. Dykes, on Coleridge, 80.
Carlyle, Thomas, his remark upon Byron's death, 106; and Job, 199; on his father, 200; Swinburne on, 200; was selfish, 201; on Keats, 201; self-conceited, 202; had little sense of gratitude, 202, 203; laborious, 203; affectionate, 203; his honesty and courage, 203, 204; hopeless to try to sum him up, 205; impossible to articulate his faith into a system or to appraise his religious influence, 206; intensely religious, 206; stood in the succession of the Hebrew prophets, 207; his vision partial, 207, 208, 211, 212; his few great principles, 208, 209; his teaching contrasted with that of Scripture, 212; reason for his biography, 213, 214; drew upon recognized forms of religious experience and expression in the voicing of his message, 214; his message summarized, 215–217; inspired and influenced others, 217, 218; Tishbite elements in, 219; religion entered into the substance of his pre-natal life, 221; much of his influence due to his evangelical training, 223; and Ruskin, similarity of their bringing up and belief, 224, 225; and Mazzini, 332, 333; and Tennyson, Tyndall's comparison of, 375.
Castelar, Emilio, on his tribute to Byron, 103 n.
Cenci, The, Shelley's, quoted, 117.
Chaldee Manuscript, a clever bit of irreverence, 148, 149.
Chalmers, Thomas, on Carlyle, 213.
Chambers, Robert, his *Vestiges of Creation*, 405.
Chaucer, religious setting of his *Canterbury Tales*, 500.
Chesterton, G. K., an entertaining companion, but an uncertain guide, 274 n.; on Dickens and Gissing, 278.
Childhood, the period of greatest fears and burdens, 423, 424.
Christian Socialism, 337.
Christian Year, 192, 193, 194.
Christianity, capable of development, 317; the dogmatism of, accountable in great measure for religious controversy, 339; the Unitarians and the orthodox, 339, 340; missionary activity, 340, 341; the burden of, 373; its essence, to interpret life's discords in terms of possible harmony, 465.
Church, the nursing mother of literature, 25.
Church of England, and Methodism, 163; strain of, runs through Tennyson's life and work, 360; liberal movement within, 334.
Church History, Milner, 176.
Church Missionary Society, 175.
Circumstance, man's mastery of, 11, 13, 19.
City of Dreadful Night, The, Thomson, 474–478.
Clapham, tradition or influence, in Macaulay family, 181–184; in Stephen family, 184–187.
Clapham sect, the, 27; use of the term, 168.
Clapham Evangelicals, their influence on literature, 175.
Clarke, J. F., cited, 344 n.
Clarkson, Thomas, 168.
Clergy, the training of their homes, of a sort to foster literature, 25–27.
Claudian, Coleridge on, 83.
Clifford, W. K., 413.
Clough, A. H., under forty when he wrote of doubt and disillusion, 424; embodies higher traits of English character, 426; compared with Bunyan, 427, 428; lent his conscience to excess of doubt, 428; had a trust in the

veracity and sanity of man's experience, 429; on doubt and faith, 429, 430; religion a chief source of his inspiration, 431; compared with Matthew Arnold, 431, 432.
Cobbe, Frances Power, 413.
Cobbett, William, 328, 329.
Cobden, Richard, 331.
'Cockney School,' 130, 131.
Coleridge, S. T., the contrasts in, 77, 78; his talk, 78; one of the great intellectual and spiritual forces of his century, 79, 80; his influence in the field of poetry, 80; still lives in works in criticism, philosophy, and religion, 81; his religious doctrine, 81; saw the significance of German learning for English thought, 81, 82; his imagination and sympathies catholic, 82; had genius for insight, 83; felt the connection of religion and literature, 83; on Claudian, 83; distinguishes between poetry and prose, 83; *The Ancient Mariner*, 84; reintroduced atmosphere of wonder and mystery into English verse, 84, 85; his prose easy to comprehend, 85, 86; on Wordsworth, 86; his two principles of criticism of Scripture, 87; had a keen sense for the organic, 87; his attitude toward the Bible, 87–89; believed that investigation would strengthen religious faith, 90; kept his hands with neatness, 95; his criticism upon the characters of Caliban and Ariel, 107.
Comedy and tragedy, the great poet sees both, 106.
Comparison, demon of, in criticism, 272; impossible where definition is impossible, 273.
Conservatism, represented by the *Quarterly*, 130; by *Blackwood's*, 131; true, consists in fostering vitality, 136.
Conservatives, Liberals of early nineteenth century the true, 134; ultra, their weakness lies in cynicism and selfishness, 137.
Contrast, tendency of critics to indulge in, 350, 351.
Conway, Moncure, on Browning, 364 n.
Cooper, J. F., 258–260.
Cooper, Thomas, 329, 330.
Corelli, Marie, 514.
Cosmos, religion based upon faith in, 9.
Cowper, William, his life, in outward seeming, monotonous, but, in reality, adventurous, 34–36; his madness in the first place not related to religion, 36; his letters, 37; why he took to verse, 37, 38; *The Task*, 38, 39; quotation on, 39; his theological obsession, 40, 41; religion his blessing, 42; his *Lines to my Mother's Picture*, 42; his hymns, 42, 43; his *Voltaire and the Lace-Worker*, 43; his *Hope*, 43, 44; the religious element in his work, 44–46; the poet of the English Evangelicals, 45, 49; source of his sense of humour, 46–48; dignified little matters, 48; lines on Anson's sailor, 49, 50.
Crabbe, George, keen of observation, 50; life's highways furnished him with tragedy and comedy, 51; knew the lot of the poor at first hand, 51–53; his poetry religious, 53; *The Parish Register*, 53, 54; a realist, 54; grew grey in his old age, 95, 96.
Craik, Mrs., 504.
Crauford, A. H., 494.
Criminal code, mitigation of the severity of, 176.
Criticism, new, of early part of nineteenth century, 129; spirit of comparison in, 272, 273, 350.
Cronwright, Mrs. *See* Schreiner, Olive.
Cross, W. L., on Thackeray, 292.

Dante, 22.
Danton, stands for the revolutionary impulse upon its destructive side, 91, 92.
Darwin, Charles, letter to Romanes quoted, 402; his early life, 403; his 'epoch-making book,' 404; idea of derived species not original with, 405; the magnitude of

the results of his work, 405, 406; his self-depreciation, 407; his dislike of religious discussion, 408, 409; his theory involved a religious question, 409, 410; his investigation, as touching man, found publicity and criticism, 411–413; hesitation of men in presence of his conclusions, 414–416; his doctrine not identical with materialism, 416, 417.
Darwin, Erasmus, 403.
David, 18.
Davidson, John, his *Ballad in Blank Verse*, 479–481; his *A Northern Suburb*, 481; his *Thirty Bob a Week*, 483, 484.
Death, Browning on, 349.
Deland, Margaret, 507.
De Morgan, William, 509.
De Quincey, Thomas, set himself definitely to the defence of current Christianity, 156; his eminence and claim upon our memories due to his mastery of rhetoric, 157; has recourse to the Bible for the language of his most splendid periods, 158; witnesses to the interdependence of literature and religion, 160.
De Selincourt, Basil, cited, 468.
De Tabley, Lord, 488.
Deuteronomy quoted, 6.
Dickens, Charles, and Leigh Hunt, 153; called an idealist, but quite as much a realist, 274, 275; the appeal of religion to, 276; ministers of religion in his works, 276; unsympathetic toward asceticism, 277; eminently humane, 277; attitude toward poverty, 277, 278; his childlikeness, 278; his appeal to childhood, 279–281; his power of seizing upon salient features, 281; his lack of restraint in pathos, 281, 282; his essential cleanness, 282, 283; his reforming purpose, 283–285; gives added illustration to the fundamentals of Christ's Gospel, 285, 286; the character of Dora in *Copperfield*, 388.
Dobson, Austin, 487.
Domett, Alfred, quoted, 389.
Don Juan, Byron's, shipwreck in, 100.
Doubters, 423–440.
Douglas, James, 425.
Duff, David, his translation of Browning's *Sordello*, 357.
Du Maurier, George, 508.
Duncan, Norman, 504.
Dynamic of Christianity, The, cited, 31 n., 169 n., 182 n.
Dynasts, The, Hardy, 545, 557.

'Early Christian' Novel, 510, 511.
Early Oriel School, 334.
Edgeworth, Maria, and Jane Austen, 242, 243; circumstances of her life, 243, 244; her work wholesome, 245; her influence on Scott, 248, 249; quoted on Scott, 252.
Edict of Nantes, 162.
Edinburgh Review, apparent lack of religious element in, 127; an outcome of revolutionary impulse, 128; protagonist of forward-looking criticism, 129; organ of the new Liberalism, 131; early volumes of, moderate tone in, 132; Sydney Smith on, 140; religious note struck in *A Concise Statement of the Question regarding the Abolition of the Slave Trade* published in, 140; its aversion to mysticism, 143.
Eggleston, Edward, 507.
Egoist, The, George Meredith, 537–539.
Eldon, Lord, Conservative, 135.
Eliot, George, on Cowper's *The Task*, 45; the historian of conscience, 302; the 'serious person' in fiction begins with, 303; her humour, 305; her dependence for material upon the characters and problems of religion, 305–307; her appreciation of the worth of common life and sense of its pathos and mystery, 308; her distinctively Christian note, 310; her 'local colour,' 497, 498.
Elizabeth, *Adventures in Rügen*, on Wordsworth's *Prelude*, 62.
Elliott, Ebenezer, 329, 330.
Emerson, R. W., on *Hiawatha*, 73;

on Carlyle, 212; heir to the Puritan heritage, 341, 342; was incurably religious, 343, 344; Ruskin on, 344 n.; his artificial multiplication of aphorisms just tolerable, 534.
England, assimilated the results of the Revolution, 328.
English language, debtor to religion, 16.
Enoch Arden, Tennyson, 383, 384.
Essays in Ecclesiastical Biography, Sir James Stephen, 169.
Evangelicals, English, Cowper the poet of, 45, 49; due to Wesleyan origin, 163; to an extent carried on the great Puritan tradition, 164; not lacking in humour, 167, 169; often caricatured, 167; characterization of, 167–170; their contribution to English literature is considerable, 168; alleged narrowness of, 173; the Calvinism of, 185. *See* Clapham Sect.
Evangeline, Longfellow, 345, 346.
Evolution, doctrine of, hesitation of men in presence of, 414–416; not identical with materialism, 416, 417.
Excursion, The, Wordsworth, 66, 68, 71, 72, 74–77.

Faber, Father, 197.
Factory acts, 176.
Fairbairn, Dr. A. M., cited, 370 n.
Faith, humour linked to, 47, 240, 556; of its essence to be constructive, 330; literature's debt to, 487–494; in Phillpotts's works, 555.
Family, development of the, 19.
Farrar, Dean, 504.
"Festus," Bailey, 425, 426.
Fiction, compared with history, 237; range of, wider than that of any critical school or sect, 238; when honest, bears its message, 238; becomes a craft and faces the danger of 'schools,' 303, 497; 'local colour' in, 497–499; writers of, bound to take account of religion, 500; recent, 501, 502; religious, 502–504; the 'Early Christian' Novel, 510, 511; theological, 515–524; of the 'social problem,' 524–532.
Fifine at the Fair, Browning, 363.
Fiske, John, 419, 420.
FitzGerald, Edward, 455–459.
FitzRoy, Captain, of the Beagle, 403.
Foreign Bible Society, 133.
Fox, W. J., 364.
Framley Parsonage, Trollope, 299, 302.
Freeman, Mrs. *See* Wilkins, Mary E.
Free-will, doctrine of, 12.
Froude, Hurrell, 193.
Froude, James Anthony, 204, 440, 441.
Fuller, Margaret, 2.

Galton, Francis, his studies about men of genius, 25.
Gaskell, Mrs., *Cranford* and *Mary Barton*, 295; religious element in, 331.
Genesis, quoted, 11; mentioned, 17.
Genius, men of, not to be judged by a special rule, 112, 113.
German language, its obligation to religion, 16.
Gifford, Wm., a narrow nature, 146.
Gilder, R. W., 492.
Gisborne, Thomas, 173.
Gissing, George, 278; Chesterton on, 278; *The Nether World*, 526–531; a great master of tragedy, 530; the ethical and spiritual note in his work, 531, 532.
Gladstone, W. E., *Gleanings*, cited, 143 n.
God, the name given by Man to the Vital Force that dwells at the source of things, 10; the object of search of religion, 11; idea of, refined and enlarged by science, 420, 421.
Godwin, Mary, 314.
Godwin, William, 313–315.
Godwin, William, Jr., 314.
Goethe, J. W. von, mentioned, 21; his faith in daemonic influence, 93; on his tribute to Byron, 103 n.
Goldsmith, Oliver, 31.
Gordon, C. W., 504.

Gosse, Edmund, on Matthew Arnold, 433.
Gothic Scriptures, 16.
Grant, Anne, on Cowper, 48.
Gray, Asa, 419.
Gray, Maxwell, 508.
Greek polytheism, 66–68.
Green, J. R., Letters of, referred to, 1 n.
Greene, G. A., 487.
Grote, George, 321, 322 n.
Grotesque, the, worshippers of, Poe the high-priest of, 261; smacks of humour or of horror, 264, 265; of terror, grimness which verges upon, in works of Charlotte and Emily Brontë, 267.

Hampden, R. D., 334.
Hardy, Thomas, his later novels lacking in humour, 47, 549, 557; identifies nature with the lot of man, 545; his Spirits, 545, 546; *The Dynasts*, 545, 557; the atmosphere of his scenes, 546–548; has outgrown his crudities, but has become more pessimistic, 548, 549; his use of rustic choruses and his humour have decreased, 549, 557; *The Return of the Native* and *The Woodlanders* represent his most characteristic work, 550, 551; *Tess* and *Jude*, 551, 552; compared with Phillpotts, 552; his introduction of a malevolent chance, 553; religion in, 556.
Harraden, Beatrice, 520.
Harte, Bret, 507.
Hawthorne, Nathaniel, his work not unreal, 269; mystery an essential element in his work, 269; takes little heed of stage properties, 270; teaches that true life is to be expressed in terms of the spirit, 271; heir to the Puritan heritage, 341, 342.
Hay, John, 524.
Hazlitt, Wm., on the French Revolution, 129; marked by more unlovely Unitarian characteristics, 150; had a measure of truly discerning liberality, 151; had a mordant, atrabilious temper, 152.
Hebrew prophet. *See* Prophet.
Hellas, Shelley's chorus from, 125.
Henderson, Mrs. M. S., cited, 468 n.
Henley, W. E., quoted, 458, 459; his defiant attitude toward Fate, 485, 486; his bumptiousness of self-assertion, 516.
Henslow, J. S., Professor of Botany, 403.
Hiawatha, Longfellow, 345, 346.
Historians, must interpret as well as depict, 496.
History, compared with the novel, 237.
Holland, J. G., 503.
Holmes, O. W., heir to the Puritan heritage, 341, 342.
House of Eld, The, Stevenson, 540–542.
Howells, W. D., on Scott, 251; as a depicter of New England life, 505.
Humour, and melancholy, association between, 46; in Hardy, 47, 549, 557; linked to faith, 47, 240, 556; not lacking in the Puritan character, 164–167; a quick sense of life's lesser incongruities, 239; man of, sometimes depressed, 241; a comprehensive term, 241; ministers to faith and becomes an ally of religion, 242; in George Eliot, 305.
Hunger, a theme of religion and literature, 19.
Hunt, Leigh, a radical, 152; illustrates that grace which suffereth long and is kind, 153.
Hutchinson, Colonel, no morose stifler of mirth, 165.
Hutton, R. H., cited, 94 n., 241 n.; on Clough, 426.
Huxley, T. H., his prominence and influence partly due to fact that he became a theologian, 24, 25; quoted, 409, 413, 416, 417; a theological controversialist of the keenest type, 413, 414; on doctrine of Evolution, 416, 417; disclaimed materialism, 418.
Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, Shelley's, quoted, 120, 121.
Hypatia, Kingsley, 298.

Idealism, influence upon literature, 341.

Idylls, Tennyson, 378–383.
Imlay, Fanny, 314.
In Memoriam, Tennyson, 374–377.
Industrial centres, large ideas often find welcome in, 512.
Inspiration, of the Old Testament, 17, 18; of the Bible, Coleridge's view of, 87–89.

Jacob, 17.
James, Henry, as a depicter of New England life, 505.
James, William, 427.
Jane Eyre, Brontë, 267.
Jeffrey, Francis, on Wordsworth, 144, 145.
Jewett, Sarah Orne, 506.
John Inglesant, Shorthouse, 511, 513, 514.
Johnson, Samuel, 23.
Jones, Ernest, 424.
Jones, Professor Henry, 218.
Jowett, Benjamin, 334.
Jungle, The, Sinclair, 524.

Keats, John, on Burns, 55; Carlyle on, 201.
Keble, John, 191, 192, 194, 195.
King James Version of the Bible, 16.
Kingsley, Charles, thought of as an essentially virile person, 296; emotional in the best sense, 297; *Yeast* and *Alton Locke*, 297, 298; *Hypatia* and *Westward Ho!* 298; *Two Years Ago*, 298; his place in literature due greatly to his appreciation of vitality of religion, 299; religion in, 331.
Kingsley, Henry, 296.
Kipling, Rudyard, quoted, 69, 161; gives evidence of the vigour which faith lends to poetry, 489, 492, 493; not a great novelist, 540; in him the will to live appears, 540; has conviction of power underlying appearances, 543, 544; his love of the ghostly, 544; has contributed to the literature of devotion, 544.

Lamb, Charles, best-loved figure in English letters, 154; a seamy side to his life, 154; his works have an undercurrent of influence toward the cherishing of the great Christian graces, 155.
Lang, Andrew, on Lowell, 348 n.; on the 'Early Christian' Novel, 511.
Language, development of, through religion, 16; of religion, part it has played in the making of literature, 560.
Laws of Nature, 418.
Lays of Ancient Rome, Macaulay, 181.
Le Conte, cited, 414 n.; popularizer of evolution, 419, 420.
Le Gallienne, Richard, cited, 468.
Liberalism, represented by the *Edinburgh*, 131.
Liberals of early nineteenth century, the true Conservatives, 134.
Literature, great, takes account of the Universe, 1; and religion, old and dear companions, 2; cry for a national, 5; close relation between religion and, 13, 18; depends upon vision and sympathy, but deals with the matters of the common day, 13; a gift of the imagination, 13, 14; the Scriptures as, 16; love how related to, 18–21; religion sometimes the chief material of, 22, 23; of implicit or avowed unbelief, relation to religion, 23–25; precedent influence of religion upon, 25–28; relation between the office of the minister of religion and the production of, 25–27; activity in, often follows religious revival, 558; great, can spring only from the deeper experiences of life, 561.
Literature, English, of the nineteenth century, its range and wealth enormous, 4; its public numerically great, with keen, facile mind, 4, 5; includes the product of America, as well as that of England, 5, 6; in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, characteristics of, 30, 31; great, product of earlier half of the century, 32; influence of religion upon, as seen in Cowper, 40–48, 60; in Crabbe, 53, 60; in Burns, 56, 57, 60; in Blake, 58, 59, 60; in Wordsworth, 66–77; in Cole-

ridge, 79–90; in Shelley, 120–126; in De Quincey, 158–160; influence of Clapham Evangelicals on, 175; significance of Christian missions to, 179, 340, 341; place which the Tractarian Movement occupies in, 192–198; abundance of material in mid-Victorian years, 350, 351; and religion, contact between, in Browning and Tennyson, 364–369; part the language of religion has played in the making of, 560; religion has profited from, 560, 561.
'Local colour,' 497–499, 548.
London, Jack, 524.
London Magazine, writers for, 130; of radical tendency, 131.
Longfellow, H. W., his verses on Burns, 56, 57; heir to the Puritan heritage, 341, 342; the domestic character of his poems, 344–346; a deft craftsman, 345.
Love, how related to religion and literature, 18–21; origin and development of, 19–21.
Lowell, J. R., heir to the Puritan heritage, 341, 342; moves in realm of concrete, 344; shrewd, humourous, and right-minded, 346; the ethical import of his writings was the natural expression of his convictions, 347; the secret of the ethical import of his writings, 348.
Lucian, his claim to remembrance, 24.
Lucretius, verses on, 22.
Luther, Martin, 16.
Lyell, Sir Charles, letter of Darwin to, quoted, 405.

Macaulay, T. B., and Wordsworth's *Prelude*, 62; his literary fame, 180, 181; extent to which the Clapham tradition or influence is traceable in, 181–183; quoted, 182, 183; on Jane Austen, 246.
Macaulay, Zachary, 174.
MacCunn, John, cited, 322 n., 331 n.
Macdonald, George, 515–517.
Mackail, J. W., on Ruskin, 232, 233.
Mackay, Charles, 425.
Malet, Lucas, 503.
Mallock, W. H., his recipe for writing a Satanic poem, 97.
Man, and Nature, belong to each other, 9; his life work, 11; his mastery of circumstances, 11, 13; refuses to be permanently subjugated by the Universe, 11; his littleness and greatness, 15; science has improved his estimate of himself, 421, 422.
Manly, Prof. J. M., on George Meredith, 534 n.
Mansel, H. L., his Bampton Lectures, 334.
Marmontel, J. F., *Memoirs*, 324, 325.
Marryat, Captain, 258-260.
Marshall, Archibald, 508.
Martineau, James, 337-339.
Martyn, Henry, 174, 178, 179, 180.
Mary Barton, Mrs. Gaskell, 295.
Masson, Prof., on Kingsley, 299.
Materialism, 416-418.
Matthews, Brander, on Scott, 252; on Hawthorne and Poe, 271.
Maurice, Frederick Denison, his preference for the word 'theology,' 335; the heir of Coleridge in things religious and philosophical, 335; his gospel, 335, 336; letter to his mother, 336; a chief power in the "Christian Socialism" movement, 337.
Mazzini, on the study of astronomy, 1; his tribute to Byron, 103 n.; his radicalism, 331, 332; "God and the People," his creed, 332; and Carlyle, 332, 333; the ethical and religious complexion of his writings, 333; on religion, 454.
McGiffert, Prof. A. C., cited, 526 n.
Melancholy, and humour, association between, 46.
Meredith, George, one of the great masters of life's secrets, 462; his literary style, 463; his sanity in ethics and religion, 464, 465; *Modern Love*, 465, 466; *Jump-to-Glory Jane*, 466-468; "erotic esotery," 472; his prose has same characteristics as his poetry, 533; his artificial multiplication of aphorisms intolerable, 534, 535; his tendency to overdo, 535; *Richard Feverel*, 534-537; a great cre-

ator of character, 535; *The Egoist*, 537-539.
Methodism, too often known by its accidents rather than its essence, 161; a sense in which the Church of England is the mother of, 163; originated Evangelical movement, 163.
Meynell, Mrs., quoted, 386, 488.
Mill, James, 311, 312, 318, 319.
Mill, J. S., an heir to atheism, 318, 321; his education, 319, 320; illustrates the fascination of religion for the human mind, 321; saw that there is an experience of the heart as well as of the head, 322; did not truckle to popular opinion, 323; his spiritual crisis, 324; used forms of religious expression, 324, 325; and Marmontel's *Memoirs*, 324, 325; his marriage, 325, 326; his *Three Essays on Religion*, 326; finds a place for religion, 326, 327.
Milman, H. H., 334.
Milner, Isaac, 168, 173, 176.
Milner, Joseph, his *Church History*, 176.
Milton, John, mentioned, 18; his purpose in *Paradise Lost* was to justify the ways of God to man, 22.
Ministers of religion, relation between their office and the production of literature, 25-27, 560.
'Minor poetry,' 460, 461.
Mirabeau, represents the better element of the Past, 91.
Misanthropy, incompatible with genuine tragedy, 100.
Missionary activity, 340, 341.
Missions, significance to literature, 179.
Moody, William Vaughn, 486.
Morley, Lord, on Byron, 105, 106; on Mill's *Three Essays on Religion*, 326.
Morris, William, 450-454.
Moses, 17.
Mozley, Thomas, *Reminiscences*, 193.
Munger, T. T., on the Christian value of literature, 21; quoted, on Hawthorne, 271.
Myers, F. W. H., quoted, 386.
Mystery, in Poe, 266; in Hawthorne, 269.
Mysticism, element of, in William Blake, 58; of Wordsworth, 65; Whig aversion to, 143-145; and mystics, 441-450, 455, 456, 514.

Napoleon, the soldier and builder, 92.
Nature, and Man, belong to each other, 9; elemental forces of, must serve man, 11.
Necessitarianism, in Thomson, 479.
Nether World, The, Gissing, 526-531.
New England, novelists who depict the life of, 505, 506.
Newman, Cardinal, cited, 161 n., 168 n.; an immediate link between the Tractarians and the Evangelicals, 189, 190; character of, 191, 192, 194; his poetry, 195; his prose, 195, 196; on Carlyle, 213.
Newton, John, and Cowper, 40, 41.
Nichol, John, cited, 93 n., 203 n., 224 n.; quoted, 211.
Novel, compared with history, 237. See Fiction.

Omar Khayyám, FitzGerald, 455, 457.
Ordeal of Richard Feverel, The, George Meredith, 534-537.
Orr, Mrs. Sutherland, cited 364 n.
Overton, Canon, on the religious element in Cowper, 45, 46.
Oxford Movement, essentially romantic, 188; its place in English letters, 192-198.

Paine, Thomas, his name associated with religion, 24.
Pantheism, 66.
Pascal, *Thoughts*, quoted, 16 n.
"Passion of the Past," 385, 387, 450, 451.
Pater, Walter, 511.
Paul, Herbert, *Stray Leaves*, 309 n.
Paul, Kegan, 314 n.
Pessimism, 474-484.
Phillips, Stephen, 490, 491.
Phillpotts, compared with Hardy, 552; his introduction of a malevolent chance, 553, 554; *The*

Secret Woman, 553-555; the part that faith plays in his works, 555-557.
Pippa Passes, Browning, 390, 391.
Pitt, William, 170.
Poe, E. A., his character, 260, 261; his personal attitude toward faith, 261; the high-priest of all who worship the grotesque, 261; his work a religious apologetic, 262; his tales without hope, but full of a haunting fear, 265-267; his mastery of mechanism, 269, 270, 271.
Poet, the great, sees both the tragedy and the comedy, 106, 107.
Polytheism, Greek, 66-68.
Pope, Alexander, 22, 23.
Powell, Baden, 334, 405.
Pragmatism, 376, 392.
Pre-Raphaelites, 443, 449.
Priestley, Joseph, 312, 313.
Prometheus Unbound, Shelley's, not a poem of negation, 122-124.
Prophecy, spirit of, active in the world's affairs in first half of nineteenth century, 33.
Prophets, Hebrew, rarely qualified their statements and, therefore, often seemingly contradictory, 209-211.
Psalms, quoted, 14, 15.
Puritanism, of Emerson, Bryant, and others, 341, 342, 347.
Puritans, by no means without a sense of humour, 164-167; the realities of their life were solemn, 164, 165; understood with difficulty by Scott, 254; Scott's depiction of, 256, 257.

Quarterly Review, apparent lack of religious element in, 127; protagonist of reactionary criticism, 129; champion of high Tory faith in Church and State, 130; early volumes of, moderate tone in, 132, 133; contributors expressed religion in conventional form, 145.

Radicalism, of Mazzini, 332; counterpart of, within the Church of England, 334; of Bushnell and Martineau, 338, 339.
Radicals, the mere, in danger of falling in love with change for its own sake, 136-138; their views and practice, 138.
Rationalism, of the Evangelicals, 185; its assault upon religion, 316-318.
Reade, Charles, 299.
Religion, and literature, old and dear companions, 2; the last century a time of theological revolution, 2, 3; science takes account of, 3, 4; derivation of the word, 6, 7; increase of the content of the word, 7; its characteristics, 7, 8; binds the incidents of man's life into a vital whole, 7; speaks many languages, and a joy to such as heed its message, 8; believes in and proclaims the Universe, 9; seeks and follows God, 11; calls men to a consideration of the greatness of their life upon the earth, 12; its understanding of salvation, 12, 13; depends upon vision and sympathy, but deals with the matters of the common day, 13; close relation between literature and, 13, 14, 18, 22; a gift of the imagination, 13, 14; and development of language, 16; human love how related to, 18–21; sometimes the chief material of literature, 22, 23; relation of literature of implicit or avowed unbelief to, 23–25; precedent influence of, upon literature, 25–28; element of, in Cowper, 40–48, 60; in Crabbe, 53, 60; in Burns, 56, 57, 60; in Blake, 58, 59, 60; connection of, with literature, in Wordsworth, 66–77; in Coleridge, 79–90; in Shelley, 120–126; questions of, moderately touched upon in early volumes of the Reviews, 131–134; note of, struck in the *Edinburgh*, 140; part of the Tory stock in trade, 145; in words and thoughts of Southey, 148; and the *Chaldee Manuscript*, 148, 149; of De Quincey, 158–160; revival of, under Wesley, 161; Clapham and Oxford Movements, 161–198; of Car-

lyle, 206; of Scott, 253, 254; office of, to reassure, 263; always makes for courage, 263; appeal of, to Dickens, 276; of Kingsley, 298, 331; of Trollope, 300; of George Eliot, 302–310; the rationalist's assault upon, 316–318; in Mrs. Gaskell, 330; Mazzini's, 332, 333; of Maurice, 334–336; of Bushnell and Martineau, 338, 339; religious controversy due in great measure to the dogmatism of Christianity, 339; attitude of the orthodox, 340; missionary activity, 340, 341; and literature, contact between, in Browning and Tennyson, 364–369; value of, to Browning and Tennyson, as poets, 369; and science, can live together, 400, 401; has a keen ear for life's discords, 465; unrest in, largely due to many new undigested discoveries, 525; note of, in George Meredith, 535, 539; in Stevenson, 540–544; in Phillpotts, 555–557; in Hardy, 556; revival of, generally followed by period of literary activity, 558; science has sometimes given rise to discussions about, 558, 559; 'social problem' implicates, 559; wide range accorded to, in this book, 559; ministers of, men of letters bred in the homes of, 560; language of, part it has played in the making of literature, 560; has profited by its connection with literature, 560, 561; reason for its influence upon literature, 561.

Renan, J. E., 511.

Revelation, capable of development, 317.

Revivals, religious, 161, 162, 558.

Revolt of Islam, The, Shelley's, quoted, 119.

Revolution, French, three types of men in, 91, 92; either inspired or necessitated the literary awakening of which the *Edinburgh*, etc., were the fruit, 128; seems to have suffered a sea-change in crossing the channel, 128; Hazlitt on, 129.

Robert Elsmere, Mrs. Humphry Ward, 517–519.

Roberts, C. G. D., 488.

Robinson, A. Mary F., Madame Darmesteter, 482.

Robinson, Crabb, quoted, 315.

Roe, E. P., 503.

Rogers, Samuel, anecdote of, 322 n.

Rolleston, Mr., 486.

Romanes, George John, goes to Cambridge and becomes a Darwinian, 394; his *Physiological Selection*, 395; as a man, 395; his loss of faith, 396, 397; further change of view and last years, 398, 399; his experience typical, 399; letter of Darwin to, quoted, 402.

Ross, G. A. Johnstone, cited, 454 n.

Rossetti, Christina, 443, 446–448.

Rossetti, Dante Gabriel, 449, 450.

Ruskin, John, gently reared, 220; middle-class in origin, 220; more gracious than Carlyle in the general tenor of his message, 221; religion entered into the substance of his pre-natal life, 221; religious home training, 221, 222; his own testimony to the work of his religious home training, 222; much of his influence due to his evangelical faith, 233; and Carlyle, similarity of their bringing up and belief, 224, 225; his preaching, grotesque, exaggerated, emotional, 226; commonly taken for granted that his doctrine lacked continuity and system, 226; true to guiding principles, 227; in accord with doctrine of personality, 227, 230, 232; his doctrine of greatness of style in art, 228–230; *Unto this Last*, and *Munera Pulveris*, 231; resigns himself to the prophet's fate, 232; has always the manner of a sincere man, 233; his frankness, 233; his sense of humour, 234; an effective preacher, 235; on Emerson, 344 n.

Russell, G. W. E., cited, 142 n., 143 n., 442 n.

Ruth, 17.

Rydberg, Victor, 511.

Saintsbury, Prof. G. E. B., on Byron, 96, 104.

Salvation, religion has much to say upon, 12; a possession of the place and power of mastery which belong to man of right, 12; how attained, 13; means mastery of circumstance, 19.
Saul, 18.
Schelling, quoted, 370.
'Schools' of literature, 497.
Schreiner, Olive, 520–522.
Science, takes account of religion, 3, 4; has resolved the contradictions of the Greek polytheism, 67; and religion, can live together, 400, 401; great popularizers of, always in some degree theologians, 419; idea of God refined and enlarged by, 420, 421; has improved man's estimate of himself, 421, 422; has sometimes given rise to religious discussions, 558, 559.
Scott, Sir Walter, on Coleridge, 79, 80; his lameness, 95; on Byron, 101; his indebtedness to Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen, 248, 249; not a reactionary, 250; a believer, 251; a 'maker,' 251; Howells' criticism of, 251; Brander Matthews on, 252; Bagehot's criticism of, 253, 257; his religion, 253, 254; understood the Puritan with difficulty, 254; made Puritan and Covenanter types extreme, 255; discerned the source of his country's power, 256; his depiction of the Puritan, 256, 257; his world essentially divine, 257, 258.
Scripture, extraordinary literary quality of, 16; the inerrancy of, a superstition, in Coleridge's time, 86; Coleridge's attitude toward, 87–89. *See* Bible.
Seeley, J. R., on Carlyle, 207.
Shairp, J. C., cited, 84 n.
Shakespeare, William, 362, 535.
Sharp, William, cited, 349, 365; quoted, 358.
Sharpe, Granville, not narrow, 173; his exposition of apocalyptic Scriptures, 177; his contributions to history and literature, 177.
Shaw, Bernard, cited, 531.
Shelley, P. B., contrasted with Byron, 107, 108; an iconoclast among social conventions, 108; his essential rightness of purpose, 109; carried the Protestant spirit to its extreme, 109; could not suspend his judgement, 109; his relations to Harriet Westbrook and Mary Godwin, 110; a great poet in spite of his morals, 111; morally and physically courageous, 113; pure in thought and life, 114, 115; loved sports, but reckless and somewhat inefficient, 114; anecdote of his getting beyond his depth in Arno, 115; not to be judged by ordinary standards, 115; believed that facts of experience must be faced, 115; his claim to the possession of reverence, subject of conflicting testimony, 116; had little sympathy with custom, 117; his positive doctrine, 118; the regeneration of mankind, subject of his contemplation, 118; his descent upon Ireland, 119; his testimony to the place and power of religion, 120–126; had sense of largeness and seriousness of life, 120; had sense of ultimate wholeness and integrity of life, 121; *Prometheus Unbound* not a poem of negation, 122–124; chorus from *Hellas*, 125.
Ships that Pass in the Night, Harraden, 520.
Shirley, Brontë, 267.
Shore, John, Lord Teignmouth, 174, 177, 178.
Shorthouse, on humour, 241; cited on Thackeray's illustrations, 293 n.; *John Inglesant*, 511, 513, 514.
Sienkiewicz, Henryk, 511.
Simeon, Charles, mentioned, 168; Sir James Stephen on, 175; his works, 176.
Sin, an interruption of the natural relation between man and God, 12.
Sinclair, Upton, *The Jungle*, 524.
Small things, worth of, 13.
Smith, Sydney, on the *Edinburgh*, 140; a sort of Greatheart, 141; his passion for righteousness and

fairness, 142; might be called buxom, 142; had deep element of spiritual and ethical conviction, 143; failed to respond to the heroic adventure of the early foreign missionaries, 144; cited, 168.
'Social problem,' 524–532, 559.
Sophocles, animated by religious idea of tragedy, 22.
Sordello, Browning, 357–360.
Southey, Robert, played a larger part in the literary history of his period than it is easy to realize, 146; patient, unselfish, devoted, 147; could perceive and appreciate the better side of men, 147; religion recognized in all he thought and wrote as great and vital concern in life, 148.
Spencer, Herbert, central thought of his philosophy foreshadowed in early works, 405.
Spenser, Edmund, 22.
Stanley, A. P., 334.
Stanley, Sir Henry M., 372.
Stephen, FitzJames, Clapham heritage in, 184, 186, 187.
Stephen, Sir James, his portrayal of the Evangelicals, 169; his literary style, 169 n.; on Henry Thornton, 171; on Charles Simeon, 175.
Stephen, Sir Leslie, on his father's literary style, 169 n.; Clapham heritage in, 184, 186, 187; on the intellectual wealth of the nineteenth century, 311; Lowell's remarks on reading his *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, 348; on Stevenson, 540 n.
Stevenson, R. L., on the contrast in Man, 15; his testimony to the necessity of faith, 492, 493; not a great novelist, 540; in him the will to live appears, 540; *The House of Eld*, 540–542; religious note in, 540–542; his ears open to 'the still sad music of humanity,' 542, 543; his consciousness of something in man that dominates the body, 543; has conviction of power underlying appearances, 543, 544; his love of the ghostly, 544; has contributed to the literature of devotion, 544.
Stillman, W. J., on religious belief, 397.
Story of an African Farm, The, Schreiner, 520–522.
Strettel, Alma, 484.
'Sunday-School books,' 502, 503.
Superstition, 262, 263.
Swinburne, C. A., his testimony to the influence of Coleridge, 79, 80; on imagination and harmony in poetry, 102, 103; on Shelley, 120; a master of poetry's form and music, 468–470; his poetry as directed against God, 470; his poetry as directed against priests and kings, 470; the paganism of his verse, 471, 473, 474; often lack of substance behind his melody, 471; fascinated with the mystery of "erotic esotery," 472; on Carlyle, 200.
Sylva, Carmen, 485.
Symonds, J. A., cited, 116 n.; *The Temptation in the Wilderness*, 488.
Symons, Arthur, cited, 470.

Task, The, Cowper's, 34, 39.
Teignmouth, Lord. *See* Shore, John.
Tennyson, Alfred, on Crabbe, 54; ruggedness of his prose and his conversation, 350; compared and contrasted with Browning, 351, 356, 360, 361, 365–369, 376, 386, 387; notable uniformity of excellence in, 353; his blank verse, 353; his verse sometimes feeble, but still with a grace of sound, 355, 356; essentially religious, 360; the elegance of his poetry, 361; his relation to the Bible, 364–369, 382; *Aylmer's Field*, quoted, 367; his *Ulysses*, 370–372; his notion of personality, 372, 373; *The Two Voices*, *St. Simeon Stylites*, and other poems, 370, 373, 374; *In Memoriam*, 374–377; prefigures something of Pragmatism, 376; his constructive argument, 377, 378; religious or theological poems, 378; the *Idylls*, 378–383; his pathos, 383–386.
Testament, Old, literary quality of, 16, 17; sense in which it is inspired, 16–18.

Thackeray, W. M., called a realist, 275; his use of Scripture language in great scenes, 286, 287; *The Adventures of Philip*, 288; *Vanity Fair*, 289; his aim to show that to be without God was to be without hope, 289; something other than a cynic, 290; an almost Homeric amplitude to his art, 290; did not regard his characters as puppets, 291; not a sentimentalist, 292; his story told from standpoint of last chapter, 292; his illustrations, 293 n.
Thomson, James, his *Seasons*, 31.
Thomson, James [B. V.], his poem on Blake, 59, 60; quoted, 99; his career, 474; his pessimism in *The City of Dreadful Night*, 474–478; *Vane's Story*, 478, 479.
Thompson, Francis, 489, 491.
Thornton, Henry, his generosity, 170, 171.
Thornton, John, 170.
Tories, represented by the *Quarterly*, 130; not lacking in high-minded and honourable men, 138.
Toryism, religion part of its stock in trade, 145.
Tractarian Movement. *See* Oxford Movement.
Tractarians, early, had something of the attitude of opportunists; 189.
Tragedy, genuine, beyond the reach of a misanthrope, 100; and comedy, the great poet sees both, 106.
Trelawny, E. J., on Shelley, 115.
Trevelyan, G. M., 184.
Trevelyan, Sir G. O., 183.
Trevelyans, the, 174.
Trollope, Anthony, 299-302.
Tulloch, Principal, on Coleridge, 79, 80; cited, 322 n., 336 n.
Tupper, M F., the irreproachable, 425; the only English writer who could afford to make a business of coining aphorisms, 534.
Two Years Ago, Kingsley, 298.
Tyndall, John, his prominence and influence partly due to fact that he became a theologian, 24, 25; on Wordsworth, 358 n.; his comparison of Tennyson and Carlyle, 375.

Ulfilas, 16.
Ulysses, Tennyson, 370-372.
Unbelief, 23.
Underwood, F. H., on Thackeray, 291, 292.
Unitarianism has been fruitful in spiritual Ishmaelites, 150.
Unitarians, of nineteenth century, wherein they were right and wherein they were wrong, 339.
Universe, has a soul, 9; Man refuses to be permanently subjugated by, 11; forces of, must serve man, 11, 12; to be treated as an organism, 134.
Utilitarianism, Mill the high priest of, 321; in how far heroic, 333.

Van Dyke, Prof., cited, 364.
Vanity Fair, Thackeray, 289.
Venn, Henry, 174.
Venn, Henry, son of John, 174.
Venn, John, 174.
Venns, the, 174.
Vital Force, dwells at the source of things, 9; Mind and Will belong to, 10; called God, 10; its entrance into a man's life, 13.

Wallace, Lew, 511.
Ward, Mrs. Humphry, 517-519.
Ward, W. G., *Ideal of a Christian Church*, 196, 197.
Watson, John, 420. 505.
Watson, William, 490.
Watts-Dunton, his characterization of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, 30, 32; *Renascence of Wonder*, 449.
Wells, H. G., on Gissing, 532.
Wesleys, the, and the Evangelical Movement, 163; difficult to tell how much England owes to, 161-163; and Newman, compared, 168.
Westward Ho! Kingsley, 298.
Wharton, Edith, 507, 508.
Whately, Archbishop, 334.
Whig aversion to mysticism, 143-145.
Whigs, their views and practice, 138, 139.

Whitman, Walt, 490.
Whittier, J. G., heir to the Puritan heritage, 341, 342; moved in the realm of the concrete, 344, 345; on Lowell, 347.
Wickliffe, 16.
Wilberforce, William, his personal charm, 171; had fame as an author, 172; a zealous Evangelical Protestant, 172; generosity of creed and life, 173.
Wilberforce, Bishop, and the evolutionary movement, 409, 411.
Wilkins, Mary E., 506.
Wilson, John, his name most intimately associated with the early days of *Blackwood's*, 149.
Wonder, is the basis of learning, 1; the nineteenth century an age of, 32; capacity for, essential to complete mental and spiritual development, 84, 85.
Woodberry, G. E., on Crabbe, 50; on Shelley, 109; cited, 342 n.
Wordsworth, William, *Prelude* and *Excursion*, 62, 358; sometimes prosaic and commonplace, 62; deficient in humour, 63; perceived the universal significance of common things, 63; his imagination exactly attuned to the music of life, 63; his dominant note that of calm and patient confidence, 64; his interpretation of Nature, 64; his mysticism, 65; his poetry as voicing loneliness, 65, 66; his 'pantheism,' 66; in *The Excursion* he sets forth the pagan view of God, 66; confident that a Spirit inhabited the earth, 68; a lonely man, 69; the poet of the isolated cottage and the solitary reaper 69-71; the Soul the significant, thing for, 71; his lapses into homiletic prose, 72; his best teaching incidental, 73; saw the essential factors of the social problem, 74; watched the advances in industrial arts and man's subjugation of the world, 74, 75; recognizes kinship between man and God, 75, 76; felt his mission to be religious, 76; and Coleridge, and Samuel Rogers, anecdote of, 85; Coleridge on, 86; drove abroad in a dung-cart, 95; Jeffrey on, 144, 145; not a stranger to the mystic's rapture, 358 n.; identifies Nature with the lot of man, 545.
Wuthering Heights, Brontë, 267.

Yeast, Kingsley, 297.
Yonge, Charlotte, 504.

Zelie, J. S., *Our Denominational Paradoxes* quoted, 151.

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